

**URBAN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: A CURRICULUM
RESPONSE TO “IS THIS NEW WINE?”**

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ABSTRACT

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This investigation examined the Black belief system in urban settings in response to the “Is This New Wine?” Paper, produced by the African American Advisory Committee of the Presbyterian Church USA, by challenging the existing curricula of theological education in its traditional forum and by including the voice of the grassroots in the development of such curriculum. An ethnographic method was used to describe the teaching and spiritual capacity of the Black community to define, sustain, and transform itself. A curriculum ministry model of urban theological education resulted as the bridging element between the academy, the church and the grassroots community.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	
Acknowledgments	Page i
Preface	vi
Chapter	1
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Focus of the Problem	7
Background of the Problem	11
Crisis of Identity	14
Scope of the Research	19
Purpose of the Study	27
Significance of the Study	29
Questions, Objectives and Hypotheses	32
Questions	32
Objectives	32
Hypothesis	33
Assumptions	33
Justification	33
Thesis	34
Summary	34
Matters of Definition	35
Defining Urban Theological Education	36
Defining Afrocentricity	39
Delimitations	46
Limitations	46
II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	49
Urban Ministry Curricula History	49
Afrocentric Literary Review	59
Leadership Literary Review	64
III. THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK	78
Historical Foundation	78
Black Presbyterian Historical Overview	82
Early Afrocentric Presbyterian Leadership	86
Henry Highland Garnet	87
Edward Wilmont Blyden	88

VI THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF <u>“IS THIS NEW WINE?”</u>	94
Toward a Theology of the Grassroots	94
A Biblical Hermeneutic of “Is This New Wine?”	98
A Constructive Theological Framework	103
Black Theology	107
Power and Privilege	111
Black Theology as God-Talk	112
Womanist Theology	114
Black Theology as Praxis	117
African Theology	118
Traditional African Religious World view	123
Traditional African Religion	125
Summary	129
V. METHODOLOGY	131
Research Design	131
Weakness of the Research	135
Role of the Researcher	136
Participant Observation	137
Students	139
The Class	142
Research Site	143
New Brunswick Theological Seminary	143
Northern New Jersey and New York Metropolitan Area	146
The Research Setting	148
The Community	149
The Church	151
Presbyterian Church (USA)	152
Research Method	154
The Sample	155
Data Collection	156
Ethical Consideration	158
Field Notes	159
Data Analysis and Findings	159
Summary	165
Curriculum Model	166
Certificate Program-Summary	170
VI CONCLUSION	180
Learnings from the Research	181
Findings and Challenges	182

VIII APPENDICES	186
A. <u>Is This New Wine? Paper</u>	186
B. City as Text Syllabus	215
C. Consent Form	218
D. Map of East Orange	219
E. Correspondence	220
Context Associate letter#1	
Context Associate Memo #2	
Letter to Elmwood Presbyterian Church # 1	
Letter to Elmwood Presbyterian Church # 2	
Letter for City as Text	
United Theological Seminary letter	
United Theological Seminary letter	
United Theological Seminary Memo	
VII SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	225

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The conceptual framework for this research emerged gradually over a five year period of reading, serving on denominational committees and task forces, meeting with peer group members and mentors, students, faculty colleagues, clergy and lay persons. Such an investigation was undertaken so as to get a better understanding of the core thinking and ethos of the African American Presbyterian Church and the African American community on urban concerns and theological reflection on those concerns. I have always felt a missional responsibility to urban issues in the Black community. That spirit of mission more than anything else, has motivated me to probe the depth dimensions of the African American Presbyterian Church and the African American community in order to discover their essence, that is, that which distinguish them as people of faith and resistance in a white dominated church and society.

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church and community in a cooperative venture of community development exploration.

PREFACE

Synergy of the Study

“Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God . . . ”
Romans 12:2

The theoretical and practical framework and content of this research validate the concerns and values arising from my life-long learning journey, couched in academic language and categories. It is written to engage both the academy and the church in a common dialogue about issues affecting the urban grassroots community. Such an acknowledgment alerts the reader to the passion and complex nature of this writer’s faith and thinking, the underlying assumptions and affirmation that ultimately helps the reader assess the arguments presented in light of the interconnection between lived experiences and thought. A reading of this preface is amplified by a brief explanation of my personal motivations for and concerns in writing this work.

I realize that an invitation to dialogue with “non-traditional” partners of theological education may be disconcerting for some of my colleagues and encouraging for others. I contend throughout the this work that for theological education to engage beyond its traditional walls of academia into practical arenas of the 21st century, it must be open to new dialogical partners. I also submit that those concerned with urban theological education as a vehicle for discerning the belief systems of “faith and resistance” of the African American community and reclaiming valuable African cultural heritage must demonstrate a willingness to

research all avenues showing promise for securing liberation- the removal of systemic injustice and inequality- and the social promotion of full humanity.

This Doctor of Ministry ethnographic study of urban theological education has three contextual foci: New Brunswick Theological Seminary, the African American Presbyterian Church, and the African American urban community. It takes a non-traditional approach to the context of learning found in “the debate of North America Theological Education.”¹ It calls into question the clerical paradigm of theological education which is oriented to monastic education; i.e. education in matters of faith best happens in retreat from the distraction of the everyday world. The practical application of religious insight gained from such experiences is not always possible in the actual practice of ministry. This is especially the case in ministry in urban contexts, where it has been widely reported that many seminary curricula are simply insufficient when it comes to addressing the needs of today’s metropolis.

Moreover, the study placed a greater value on non-campus based theological inquiry in urban situations. In this case, it proposes a curriculum design of theological education that has as its center the congregation and the community as a composite learning modality from an Afrocentric perspective. It suggests that an Afrocentric paradigm that places Africa at the center of all teaching, learning and spiritual inquiry is of desirable educational value to the curriculum in urban theological education. Such an emphasis on urban

¹ Edward Farley, Theo~logia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

theological education represents a much needed approach that will not only advance the discussion of curriculum among theological educators, students, but the members of the urban church and the community as well.

This non-campus based theological focus incorporates the philosophy, methodology and structures of traditional theological education. Efrain Agosto, pushes the boundaries of such an innovative approach when he argues to “bring the classes, the class schedules, the professors, the readings, the administrators, the advisors, the accreditation mechanism to the context where neighborhood women and men already exercise significant leadership.”² The curriculum emerges out of the community’s understanding of God incarnated in the faith and resistance of the people to deal with socio-political and economic problems through contemplation and lived experiences in church and community. Its quest is to bring together the theoretical and the practical as a worthy discipline of urban theological education in the academy, the church, and at the grassroots level. Such synthesis supply the academy and the urban church with a new way of teaching and doing ministry that integrate issues contextually.

As a prelude to this study, an insight to my life’s urban theological education journey seem appropriate. My life is a reflection of an urbane understanding of neighborhoods, cities and a world becoming increasingly urban. I am a product of the urban community, the urban church, and both campus and non-campus based urban theological education. Having a language for each of

² Efrain Agosto, “The Gifts of Urban Theological Education: A Personal and Professional Reflection,” Theological Education, 33 (November, 1, 1996), 93-105.

the above entities is essential for facilitating a common discourse. Born in Cincinnati, Ohio I was always interested in studying the socio-cultural life styles of my community. I guess I would say that I have been studying inner city neighborhoods as interpreted by people who live there all of my life.

I grew up in the post-war period of the 1950s when the West End of Cincinnati was just beginning the transformation from white to a predominantly Black community. Stretching from the Ohio river to the northwest, the West End was the industrial basin of Cincinnati. Judith Bechtel writes:

Once the home of wealthy Cincinnatians, an aging neighborhood of three-and four-story tenement houses near downtown business district, the West End was predominantly black and increasingly poor. It was a lively and interesting neighborhood, teeming with children and situated in the city's basin near Crosley Field, home of the Cincinnati Reds. Cincinnati was so completely segregated in 1945 that no mainline Protestant church there was integrated.³

It was a time shaped by "Jim Crow Laws" and racial segregation. The public policies of the day served to frame the social conditions and institutional life that separated us from a commensurate way of life. The subtle and overt messages we heard were de-humanizing and oppressive in nature, designed to keep us in our so-called place and subservient to the dominant culture. Survival depended on how well one negotiated the subtle rules and regulations of racism and racial segregation, and at the same time maintain a healthy perspective and appreciation of one's rich cultural heritage.

³ Judith A. Bechtel and Robert M. Coughlin, Building The Beloved Community: Maurice McCrackin's life for Peace and Civil Rights (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 58.

It was also a period shaped by the systemic violations perpetrated on the community through urban renewal, public policy, police brutality, relocation of jobs, interstate highway expansion, and the dismantling of neighborhood schools. Prior to the implementation of the city's 1950 Master Plan for urban renewal, (some would say "Negro removal") the West End was home to 78,000 residents. Today, less than 7,000 residents call it home.

In spite of these racist policies and conditions, in the Black community of the West End, we were somebody. We were one to three generations post reconstruction descendants of Africans who were enslaved. They were doctors, lawyers, teachers, ministers, social worker, business owners, activists, artists, domestics and laborers all working to make a life for themselves and their families. We were neighbors.

A prevailing spirit of extended family permeated the community with a sense of assurance and solidarity in times of crisis. This same spirit promoted a recognition for building community from the inside out. This spirit was part of the community's instruction of faith and resistance in a white-dominated world that propagandized a negative self-image to accomplish the immoral end of destruction of people of color. Our strength as a community against such atrocities was in our togetherness, and our understanding of who we were. It was a spirit that defined our cultural world view.

The community itself offered opportunities to structure our own learning experiences. There was also a kind of moral stability and security in the

community that has now since vanished. Unlike the lack of moral strength and character of instruction in today's society, we experienced the best moral teachings of the community. I, for instance, intuitively knew at an early age that there was something very powerful about the teachings and spiritual life of the Black community. It happened in the homes and schools, in the church school and the sanctuary as well as on the streets.

As children, our social construction of reality was shaped by the cultural allegories of the community. The myths emerged from the community's stories and created a world that ordered and gave meaning to our lives. Adults conveyed a sense of pride and dignity to young people as they interacted among themselves resulting in the emergence of a very powerful and sophisticated community pedagogy that narrated the community's collective physical and psychological experience and development.

Harvard University social scientist William Julius Wilson who makes a valuable contribution to this discussion in his research and publication, When Work Disappears, identified three major dimensions of a community maintaining effective social control as persons realize their common goal:

- 1) the prevalence, strength, and interdependence of social network;
- 2) the extent of collective supervision that the residents exercise and the degree of personal responsibility they assume in addressing neighborhood problems; and 3) the rate of residents participation in voluntary and formal organizations.⁴

⁴ William Julius Wilson, When Work Disappears: The World and the New Urban Poor (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 20.

The primary cohesive elements embedded in the West End were in the moral instruction of ‘right and wrong. This ethical paradigm permeated the entire cultural ethos of the community’s understanding of itself. For example, the biblical stories, sermons, hymns, community narratives, affirmations, and celebrations were all interwoven into the instructions given to us as children. These lessons of morality in the church carried over in the community and vice-versa as adults illustrated their lives based on the teachings of the church. All of these elements provided a metaphor for the African concept of ‘village’ conveyed throughout the West End. Hence, the community was the place where learning occurred. It was the “classroom” reflecting on its experience.

The West End was a place you belonged. It was how one introduced and identified one’s self. From this biased perspective, I am convinced that who I am, and what I am called to be and do in this time of my life is a consequence of my early childhood, my family and extended family relations, my religious and community experiences, and my ultimate desire to engage in the learning process of helping to build or rebuild human communities in cities.

The West End nurtured me with an appreciation of its many cultural and social realities. It taught me its secrets to sustain itself against all odds. I was privy to a community nuance that accentuates my critique of urbanology. From these experiences, I have attempted to demonstrate my commitment to the justice realities contributing to the continual community building by providing leadership in the community, church and academy.

When I reflect on these experiences, what emerges is the following illustration of how my spiritual journey and how my present context of ministry is integrated as a response to God's calling to advance the field of urban ministry in theological education. It is my attempt to discern "what is God calling me to do at this stage of my life?" Ever since I could remember, I have always questioned what my purpose is in life. I always delighted in the life of the mind. I imagined somewhere in my life-time participating in the ministry of Jesus Christ, and contributing to the improvement of the quality of Black life. One might say, a kind of alchemy of spirit, intellect, and experience formed me as a teacher of urban theological education.

When I began my curious obsession with the idea of integrating community organizing, social work, urban planning and ministry while at Johnson C. Smith seminary (1977-79), I frequently had to defend my interest in these areas against skeptics who claimed, "I was being too social." Now twenty years later the climate has changed. The mainline Protestant Churches and seminaries are eager to learn about the subtleties of urban ministry as mission and a discipline.

This research contains a profoundly different understanding of urban affairs from what began twenty years ago when I committed my life to God's service with intelligence, passion, and imagination. Of all the career paths ventured on in the past thirty years, the gospel ministry in an urban context has brought me the greatest fulfillment. Urban ministry and now urban theological

education is for me a vehicle of liberation and a source of personal growth and formation.

And although I would not have said this as recently as five years ago, I firmly believe God has prepared me through a montage of lived experiences for a special teaching ministry. What this means personally and professionally is having an urban ministry identity grounded in an interdisciplinary body of knowledge of theory and praxis, thought and faithfulness, knowing and doing is crucial to how one effectively ministers in urban settings. It also means getting to this level of integrative consciousness requires one to be intentional and committed to learning about urban ministry.

I have been ordained in the Presbyterian Church USA for 17 years. During this time, I have been an urban pastor in Wilmington, Delaware, a governing body executive in charge of metropolitan mission and ministry in Detroit, and now a seminary professor for urban ministry at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. My life and my passion for the city, urban culture, and learning have merged in a framework for teaching persons about the subtleties of ministry in cities.

New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) represents the pinnacle of my urban ministry journey. In August of 1991, I accepted the position of Assistant Professor of Metro-Urban Ministry. Thinking about the greater metropolitan area of New York and Northern and Central New Jersey the seminary initiated an urban ministry concentration in its curriculum that has

begun to reshape its identity and mission focus. It stepped forward to serve new students from racial and other cultural backgrounds, and denominations along with its traditional Reformed Church in America constituency. NBTS is still experiencing a transition from a racially exclusive past to a racially inclusive future. Because of its diverse student body and its emphasis on urban ministry, the seminary is in the unique position to reach out to the urban ethnic churches of the region.

Teaching urban ministry has become for me a culmination of lived experiences and reflections of God's self disclosure and God's revelation in my life. Looking back over my life several factors played a significant role in my calling to teach urban ministry. They are: family, teachers, mentors on the one hand, and the church and the community on the other. Together, they shaped and reshaped for me an urban curriculum and instruction that gave me a unique perspective and commentary on the church and the community. I shall never forget a mentor saying to me thirty years ago, that "You cannot fire bomb systemic violence". Ever since then, I have spent my adult life learning and working inside and outside various institutions and organizations addressing the systemic issues affecting the Black community. It is these experience, along with my formal education, that I bring to the seminary classroom in its traditional structure and its non-traditional structure.

What is important to keep in mind with all of what has been said up to now is that my entire community seemed to have been organized and constructed

in a large sense as a teaching and learning environment that valued community life where people supported one another performances. The community is the place where we learned to hold up one another. The community made use of rituals, symbols, myths and cultural traditions for our political, social, economic and spiritual benefit. Moreover, it conveyed to me a sense of identity, purpose, and direction.

I must also emphasize that the church and community working together formed the basis of my vision of ministry in cities. For example, the Presbyterian Church that I grew up in was not afraid to engage the Black community and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. West Cincinnati St. Barnabas Presbyterian Church (a racially integrate congregation) taught me about a Jesus who courageously stood up against those in authority and power and spoke out against injustice, who fed the hungry, who clothed the naked, who healed the sick, who visited the prisoners, who cared about what happened to women and children, who was murdered by people He loved, and whom God raised from the dead. They instilled in me at an early age a sense of pride and responsibility to represent the Black race and to give back to the community what the community had given to me. This teaching is foundational to how I teach, preach, and work in communities helping people to experience the same resurrected Christ in their lives.

Another example that affirms my calling to teach and to give back to the community is that I grew up in a church that took seriously the commandment to

“love your neighbor” (Matt. 19: 19 NRSV) and the prophet Jeremiah’s oracle “to seek the welfare of the city” (Jer. 29:7 NRSV). In this way, it was not afraid to take a stand against racial and political policies and practices that were not in the best interest of the community. Watching my pastor, the Rev. Maurice McCrackin, taken off to jail (sometimes for extended terms) for what he believed was unjust expenditures of government funds for war purposes was a clear illustration of the church’s biblical teaching and commitment to the community.

Later, I observed his participation in the civil rights movement at the risk of losing his church and ultimately his ordination privileges.⁵ McCrackin was one of few white men who, because of his conviction for justice and liberation, gained the respect and appreciation of the Black community. As a result, I grew up with the belief that this was the life example every church leader ought to minister in community. It was how the community should see the involvement of the church of Jesus Christ.

The West End was replete with examples of strength and moral courage during this period. The church and the community came together in solidarity to exemplify models of integrity and leadership that reflected the best critique of the system of segregation and racial discrimination. In this sense one might conclude, I have been shaped by the faith, resistance and spirituality of men and women who because of their love of God and neighbor stood up for what they believed

⁵ Bechtel and Coughlin, *Beloved Community*, 176. On June 12, 1962, Maurice McCrackin was informed that his pulpit was declared vacant as of July. The following February he was informed that he was no longer a minister of the Presbyterian Church. The Stated Clerk of the Presbytery put the final touches on McCrackin’s ouster in a letter informing him that his ordination has been “set aside”.

was morally right and risked their lives to improve the quality of life in the community.

Their lives were a persona of dignity and grace epitomizing a textbook illustration of urban theological education in the truest sense. I think of myself and my ministry as a synthesis of the teachings of these mentors. Hence, I have for the most part been a church and community leader who has tried to think and work for systemic justice in the Black community sometimes at great sacrifice to self and family. As such my life is a living documentation of the best moral and social teachings the community had to offer.

In summary, these experiences of the teachings of the church and community, my leadership in the community, my own encounter with the triumphant Christ as Lord, and my calling to the ordained ministry helped to form the synergy of my ministry. My love of the city, and passion for teaching is my way of giving back to the community what the community gave to me. My vision of urban ministry and urban theological education is to recover through this Doctoral Ministry research the Black community's spiritual and teaching propensity. I am convinced that God has called me to New Brunswick Theological Seminary at this stage of my personal life journey to contribute to bridging the pedagogical and theological gulf between the academy, the church, and the community.

Finally, this work is a prolegomena to a larger dialogue of the merger of the academy, church and community as a center of learning and leadership

development. Chapter one facilitates a systematic investigation of those structures in the community that contributes to the crisis of faith and resistance to the destructive forces in the African American community. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the Is This New Wine? Paper as a framework for the research. Chapter two examines the literature of urban curricula, and the growing complexity of urbanization and ministry in our cities and nation over the past fifty years. It then examines the controversy of the Afrocentric movement for its effectiveness in urban theological education curriculum. Additionally, it examines leadership theories as a the key element for urban ministry. Chapter three discusses the historical foundation of the African American Presbyterian involvement in the Presbyterian Church. Two African American Presbyterian leaders are profiled as vanguards of the Afrocentric movement. Chapter four discusses the notion of a grassroots urban theology of faith and resistance, teaching and learning, action and reflection, knowing and practice of urban ministry in the African American community and what it means for African American Presbyterians as partners in the discernment of God's self disclosure and God's self-revelation in crisis situations. It discusses the evolution of the Black Theology movement to blend theory and practice. Chapter five discusses the research design and methodology used for data collection, and proposes a curriculum model of urban theological education that attends to distinct Afrocentric precepts as paradigms of leadership and community development. It

is a model that can be easily replicated by the academy, the church, and the community.

These reflections emerged from my life journey in urban culture from a grassroots perspective, to an urban pastor, administrator, and educator with my vision of leadership for the spiritual revitalization of urban and African American communities. I needed to draw together the various threads of seemingly contradictory thesis, propositions, commitments, and experiences into some larger, more encompassing vision. Who I am as a person and as an urban practitioner is shaped by these many experiences. The people that I met and the crisis I encountered shaped me and gave my life meaning and form. And since personal experiences are such a powerful teacher, it is important to consider if it is possible to create or structure such experiences, rather than waiting for them to happen.

I hope that my findings will inspire others in urban seminaries, churches and communities to collaborate to make greater connection between - or at least to pose new questions about responsibilities and commitment that sometimes seem irreconcilable and will assist congregations in undertaking the challenge of urban ministry in the 21st century. I feel I will have accomplished my objective if the conversation of urban ministry and urban theological education is continued beyond the scope of this work.

CHAPTER I

*"If you don't know who you are, then anyone can name you.
And if anyone can name you, you will answer to any name."*

African Proverb

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the reader to the problem of theological education, inherent in curricula, to blend theory and practice in urban situations; it examines the problem against the background of the urban landscape over the last ten years that gives rise to the inability of the Academy and the African American Presbyterian church to address the crisis spiritually and pedagogically in the grassroots African American community. The problem is making use of urban theological education as an effective proposition framed, more particularly, in light of analysis of the African American community presented in the document Is This New Wine?: A Call for Prayer, Study and Action¹ produced by the African American Advisory Committee of the Presbyterian Church USA.

The critical question addressed throughout the research is: how do seminaries cultivate leaders who mobilize and empower urban communities to be self-defining and self-reliant? It is this researcher's opinion that institutions of theological education must establish an urban ministry body of knowledge that

¹ Is This New Wine?: A paper addressing African American issues for discussion within the Presbyterian Church (USA) 1992, 3. This study is primarily a response to the current discussion taking place in the Presbyterian Church and more particularly in African American Presbyterian Churches. References throughout the research is in direct correlation to the Is This New Wine? Paper (See Appendix: A. for a thorough reading of the paper).

connects faculty, students, and pastors to the systemic realities and challenges faced in our inner cities. Faculty in particular are in positions to illustrate this connection by engaging in contextual critique of their course material. By their very nature seminaries are repositories of new approaches, technologies, and methods of ministry that must be available to the entire church.

At the core of the research is the question: Should urban ministry constitute a theological discipline in its own right or should it be more intentionally woven throughout the whole curriculum? This, of course, relates to the current discussion of excellence in theological education. The emerging vision of a discreet urban field raises all sort of possibilities in terms of curriculum development.

Statement of the Problem

Is the current clerical paradigm of theological education the most effective for urban church revitalization and the transformation of our urban communities? The answer to this question is complex and not without controversy, but a basic factor lies in the foundation of this research that articulates to an alternative approach. The question exemplifies the kind of discussion taking place in various corners of the theological enterprise. "It implies," according to Joseph Hough and Barbara Wheeler, "that in the past, reform had more to do with the changing socio-cultural context of ministry than with radical questioning of the individualistic clerical model."² Seminaries understand themselves to be about

² Joseph C. Hough, and Barbara G. Wheeler, ed., Beyond Clericalism: The Congregation as a Focus of Theological Education (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), ix.

the cognitive and spiritual formation of men and women who will provide the necessary leadership for the church to continue its mission and ministries in cities.

“Anyone associated with theological education,” says Hough, “for ministers in the ‘main-line’ Protestant churches of the United States is surely aware that there is widespread discontent with the schools providing this education. Criticism range from charges that the curricula of the schools are too academic and have little relevance for the actual practice of the ministry to a trivialization of their curricula.”³

This statement by Hough and others participating in the conversation exemplifies not only the controversy but the growing reality that theological education in North America is changing rapidly to the point that it must finally come to reflect the racial, gender and ethnic diversity of the ever increasing multi-cultural reality. Daniel O. Aleshire writes:

The history of North American theological education has been predominantly European and male. However, across the North America religious communities, this history is giving way to a future that is more racially and gender inclusive. This is important because these groups have significant contributions to make to majority self-understanding, but also because much of the growth in religious participation in the US and Canada is emerging from racial, ethnic, and linguistic minority communities.⁴

In the past ten years the North American theological schools have engaged in a fervent debate on the nature of theological education centered on three key

³ Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and John B. Cobb, Jr., Christian Identity and Theological Education (Atlanta: Scholar Press, 1985), 1.

⁴ Daniel O. Aleshire, The ATS: Quality and Accreditation Project Theological Education, ATS publication, volume, XXX, Number, 2, Spring, 1994.

questions. “What is theological about theological education? Is theological education specifically for clergy? What is the most effective way to teach in theological education?”⁵ Not only are these questions crucial for developing a contextual framework for urban theological education; they have framed the debate among denominations, clergy, congregations, and theological schools for nearly a hundred years. “Theological education is the self same thing,”⁶ says David Kelsey as he pushes forward a major argument of Edward Farley:

It may take place in a variety of setting, only one of which may be clergy education. It is the same *paidia* (meant in Greek a process of “culturing” the soul, schooling as “character formation”) whether it occurs in the context of a congregation, a theological seminary, or a college or university department of religious studies.⁷

This statement by Kelsey appropriately describes with elasticity and clarity the present debate in theological education. It also provides an expanded discussion of alternative models of theological education uniquely prescribed in this research.

For example, talking about curricula reform in North America Theological Education and ministry in an urban context together is fraught with political problems in seminaries, because of competing definitions for realities that these terms are believed to represent in terms of theory and practice. This dichotomy

⁵ David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 6. Kelsey carefully analyzes the various proposals made by six major book-length contributions to the discussion of the future of ministerial preparation. He puts in context the course of the conversation over the past ten years regarding the nature and character of theological education.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁷ *Ibid.*

says, Efrain Agosto, “reflects the age-old battle in seminaries with regard to the dichotomy of the so-called ‘theoretical disciplines’ and the so-called ‘practical disciplines’ . . . that has been exacerbated over the years by the influence of academic guilds upon our theological faculties.”⁸ Especially is this true in urban ministry, where it has been documented by experts and others that seminary programs (with few notable exceptions) are simply out of touch with the needs of today’s metropolis. This opposition by faculties to be more praxis-minded jeopardizes the mission opportunities for seminaries to engage in 21st century theological education.

Theological education must become self-critical at this point of location—looking at the historic and sociological reasons for the preservation of the withdrawn academy. What purpose is served by such decontextualization; or more to the point, whose? Are they not withholding educational resources not only from students, but from the community as well?

The challenge is the need to move beyond the division of what is practical and what is theoretical in our discussion of “urban ministry” and theological education to an integration of disciplines unique to contemporary urban life. Agosto further states: “For authentic, quality ministry training to take place, urban or otherwise, rigorous reflection on pastoral action must be at the core of the theological disciplines, whether we are studying church history, theology, preaching, counseling, or the Pauline letters.”⁹ As communities of faith and

⁸ Efrain Agosto, “The Gift of Urban Theological Education: A Personal and Professional Reflection” THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION 33: 1 (Autumn, 1996), 98.

⁹ Ibid., 100.

learning, seminaries are challenged to lead the church to respond creatively to the urgent needs of our urban communities, and to reach new horizons in theological education, by keeping theory and practice together in creative tension and by breaking down the dividing walls that separate the various fields of theological education, thus building up a theology and a ministry of integrity and wholeness.

The problem is further complicated by the presumption of location for theological education. In addition to the dichotomous discourse of theory and practice, is the question of defining the appropriate place for teaching contextual theological education. Is the isolated environment of campus-based theological education the best place to train leaders for the urban church? Traditional theological seminaries should recognize the opportunity to expand their present curricula paradigm beyond the monastic ideal of the traditional classroom to the wider community.

“Urban theological education,” states Eldin Villafane Professor of Christian Social Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and Director of the Contextualized Urban Theological Education Program (CUTEEP):

should be structured to train both clergy and lay persons. While distinct tracks can be provided for each, the best programs will provide for interaction by way of a flexible curriculum. In other words, the curriculum will provide courses and projects where both the potential clergy and lay person participate jointly.¹⁰

Further:

¹⁰ Eldin Villafane, Seek The Peace of The City: Reflections on Urban Ministry, (Grand Rapids: Wms. Eerdman Publishing Co. , 1995), 78.

The dynamic and rich interaction of persons and issues that is found in a local class setting where the “people of God” model is present is critical for the life and mission of the church in the city.¹¹

Focus of the Problem

This is a timely study of the capacity of New Brunswick Theological Seminary to think non-parenthetically about 21st century curriculum issues of urban theological education in relation to the churches in the cities of New Jersey. The study engages in a well-timed conversation with the questions raised in the Is This New Wine? Paper, which draws an acute theological and sociological analysis of the crisis faced in African American communities and called into question the mission outreach role of the African American Presbyterian Church.

The research is unique in that it focuses a response to the questions raised in the Is This New Wine? Paper by challenging the existing curriculum of theological education in its traditional form and by including the voices of the grassroots in the development of such curriculum. It is through the analysis of the grassroots’ theology and pedagogy that a more accurate remedy to the crisis of the African American community can be adequately addressed by the church and the academy. A rethinking of the current curriculum paradigm of theological education for urban situations is the bridging element proposed in this research between the academy, the church and the grassroots community.

The cities today are too complex for a mid 19th century “industrial age” solutions, and this is particularly true in relation to poor and African American

¹¹ Ibid. , 79.

communities plagued with various sorts of socio-economic crisis. The same industrial age convictions fall short for theological educational institutions and the Christian church who see it as their purpose to address such crisis as ministry and mission. In many ways seminaries reflect a 19th century theological curriculum that is out moded for the current crisis faced in urban America.

Therefore, it is apparent that the academy and the church exist in a new urban reality that is now on the growing edge of an ever changing society and world. Work as we know it, for example, has radically changed. The social and economic characteristics of past labor-intensive industrial cities of the late- 20th century are rapidly shifting to a global economy, a and highly intelligent technological service industry. We are living in the age of the information revolution, the era of the World Wide Web, of daily advances in communications technology where a universe of knowledge is only a keyboard and a modem away. Against this background is a phenomenal urban globalization. By the turn of the next century, projections are that a majority of the world's population will live in cities.

These technological advances have the potential to profoundly affect the urban landscape of the 21st century in much the same way as the industrialization of the mid-nineteenth century. The affect these technological changes will have on the least of persons will have untold consequences not too dissimilar to the affects of industrialized urbanization one hundred years ago. In the same way that the Social Gospel movement emerged to speak to the evils in an urbanizing

world at the turn of the twentieth century, the church and the academy are called upon to speak prophetically to the social divide of technology.

It is important, based on the above premise, that we understand the wider implications of these changing characteristics for the academy, the church, and urban communities. Robert Linthicum underscored the enormity of the crisis in cities around the world:

No previous generation has had to face human problems of the magnitude or had to wield urban power on this scale. This means that the church has unprecedented potential for ministry and world evangelization. The world is coming to the city—and we can be there to greet it in Christ's name.¹²

As persons prepare for leading the church into the 21st century, there is a need to understand the dynamics underlying such changes. Persons who feel called to ministry need to possess an “alternative consciousness”¹³ to the changes taking place in the city.

Many inner-city neighborhoods now evidence characteristics of underdeveloped third world countries, a reality quite dissimilar from the suburban areas that surround them. Similarly, churches in cities are being challenged to respond to changes in their communities, changes in ethnic composition, in language, and in lifestyle. Congregations are looking for support and guidance in developing strategies that take into account the urban setting in which they find themselves. Throughout the nation major cities urban churches are crying out for

¹² Robert C. Linthicum, City of God/ City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 19.

¹³ Walter Bruggeman, The Prophetic Imagination (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

leadership with vision trained to make strategic intervention both in the church and in the community.

Moreover, seminaries must be willing to reach out into the deserted places of our urban communities with discernment and compassion in concrete ways that address the crisis of community. They must be concerned with the pain and suffering of the community in the same way as they are with dogmas and the abstractions of Greek classical theological education. They must be willing to articulate in words and action the human condition of urban communities in which the church and seminary are called to be a partner in the struggle for liberation. Once this is inserted in the curriculum then the first step toward bridging the gulf will become more conceivable.

This research gives scholarly treatment to the Black belief system in the urban context. The problem addressed in this critical study is one of bridging the theological and pedagogical gulf of urban theological education in the seminaries, the church, and the community, particularly, the grassroots urban community. This gulf has resulted in academia's seemingly inability to move beyond the guild affiliation and to meet the new challenge of social, economic and structural dislocation within an increasingly urban society. And while it is true that theological education and more specifically "Black Theology" has provided leadership and a beneficial analytical framework for examining problems in the Black milieu, the fact cannot be denied that a crisis of great proportion exists in

the Black church and community that has called into question the effectiveness of the academy and the Black church.

This study is particularly concerned with the disparaged relationship among African American Presbyterians located in urban neighborhoods. Additionally, it examines the depreciated relationship between the seminary community, the African American Presbyterian Church, and the grass roots community. The challenge before churches and seminaries is to formulate a missiological approach that examines critical urban issues based in an Afrocentric worldview rooted in African American culture and heritage. The parameters of Afrocentrism, i.e. self-determination, unity, cooperation, are the norms by which this research is conducted. Afrocentrism then becomes an essential paradigm in order to construct a theology and pedagogy by which a core curricula would emerge as an appropriate contextualized model of urban theological education. Suffice to say, that a thorough discussion of Afrocentrism and urban theological education will take place later in this chapter.

Background of the Study

It is important to establish from the onset the background from which the research emerges. Urban theological education in the 1990s takes place in an environment of "*change, crisis, and conflict*."¹⁴ "Our inner-cities," says William Julius Wilson, "are the most deteriorated of industrialized nations."¹⁵ Our society

¹⁴ Dean Borgman, "Urban Theological Education: The Youth Connection", Eldin Villafañe and Bruce W. Jackson, ed., The Urban Theological Education Curriculum: Occasional Papers (Boston, MA.: Contextual Urban Theological Education Enablement Program CUTEED, 1997), 23.

¹⁵ Wilson, When Work Disappears, provides a scholarly treatment of the socio-economic impact on inner-city neighborhoods when work disappears. The central problem is that the demand for labor has shifted away from low-skilled workers because of structural changes in the economy.

has gotten onto the information super highway at such a rapid pace that millions of urban poor have been left behind.

The issues of ministry in urban centers of the United States mirror challenges facing the Church in non-western, large cities around the globe: employment, housing opportunities, access to quality health care and good education, environmental and safety concerns. These issues are far more complex than simply assuming old philosophical postures of theory versus practice or academy contrasted by community polarities. The reality is that some of the most devastating human and environmental challenges of the new global market reality and post-modern society are to be found in North America urban centers where traditional approaches to theological education have not proven effective in preparing clergy to address these urban realities. Theological education needs to move beyond its traditional bifurcation of theory and practice—often at the expense of practice. Urban complexities will require a more comprehensive and creative approach to theological education.

The technological advances and global economic shift of the past fifty years have created a climate of uncertainty for inner-city communities across the country. Once thriving industrial communities now are vast ghettos and toxic wastelands. In contrast, we have moved from being a labor-intensive society to a market-driven service economy that relies more on information and knowledge as its economic product of the future. The major employment skill required for the twenty-first century is one based in knowledge and the transference of knowledge.

This focus period of the crisis faced in the African American community between the legacy of President Ronald Regan's administration through the second term of President Bill Clinton has seen more government cutbacks for the poor, disinvestment in cities, deteriorating education systems, political entrenchment, flawed welfare and health-care reform policies, corporate greed and downsizing than any other time. Social, economic, and political policies driven by class ideologies of racism, sexism, classism, individualism, and consumerism have marked the end of the industrial revolution in much the same way it began. This latter decade of the second millennium leading into the third, may turn out historically to be the most devastating for African Americans since our enslavement.

Considering the above analysis, this research addresses primarily the scope and breath of African American Presbyterian mission and ministries, and New Brunswick Theological Seminary engagement in New Jersey urban grassroots communities. What is meant here, by the term "grassroots," is inner-city poor and working class people who struggle daily against public policies and regulations to carve out a decent living for themselves. It refers to the way people of faith in inner-city neighborhoods articulate the existence of God in a non-conventional manner to that of organized Christian theology, to define, sustain, and transform their communities. It refers also to tracing how those values and belief systems deeply rooted in African and African American cultural history operate in the

midst of crisis. It suggests a whole new way of teaching theological education in an urban context.

Crisis of Identity

A curriculum of urban theological education that addresses the crisis faced in the African American community and the African American Presbyterian church must address specifically the issue of crisis of cultural identity. To be a part of a predominately white denomination, for example, raises all sorts of ambivalence for African American Presbyterians about who and what they are in the definitional struggle for identity in the African American community. This identification with the stoic elitism of white Presbyterians and the presumed privileges and power associated with them have divided Black Presbyterians' loyalty in addressing the issues facing the Black community.

Since the inception of African Americans into the Presbyterian Church in 1763, Black Presbyterians have patterned their worship, music, and theology after white Presbyterians. In short, the style and content of African American Presbyterian ministry and mission are imitations of white Presbyterian theology and mission. This historic self-perception of Black Presbyterians in a white denomination and that of the Black community along with a middle-class life style is the identity crisis referred to in the writings of W.E.B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, Na'im Akbar, Paulo Freire, and Gayraud Wilmore.

In his celebrated classic The Soul of Black Folks, written in 1903, DuBois identified clearly and accurately the dilemma of self-perception suffered by

African American Presbyterians. In essence, he was raising the question: how could persons of African descent be both American and African without damaging either their Americanness or our Africanness? He goes to great length to described this dilemma as “double-consciousness” “that leads to ambivalence or confusion about identity, which further lends itself to social alienation and despair.”¹⁶ He explains it as follows:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, -a world which yield him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. This history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,-this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows the Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellow, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in His face.¹⁷

This “double-consciousness,” says Peter Paris, “of Black Americans has led the Black churches to internalize an ambiguous social ethic that has served, on the one hand, as a lure toward an ideal vision of society and, on the other hand, as a

¹⁶ Caryle Fielding Stewart, III, Soul Survivors: An African American Spirituality (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 13.

¹⁷ W. E. B. DuBois, The Soul of Black Folks (New York: First Signet Classic Printing, 1969), 45.

serious restraint on the race's sociopolitical development.”¹⁸ “This moral conflict permeates all aspects of their common life, that is, their autonomy, moral agency, political orientation, and understanding of power.”¹⁹

Carter G. Woodson, the father of the call to celebrate Black History, in the preface of his 1933 pivotal publication Mis-education of The Negro writes about the inferior education of African American that is relevant in today's debate:

No systematic effort toward change has been possible, for, taught the same economics, history, philosophy, literature and religion which have established the present code of morals, the Negro's mind has been brought under the control of his oppressor. . . . When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his “proper place” and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.²⁰

Na'im Akbar, a Muslim Afrocentric psychologist, looks at the impact of this double-consciousness as anti-self image from a view point of Judeo-Christian imagery. He states in Chains and Images of Psychological Slavery:

That the most obvious problem that comes from the experience of, for example, seeing God in an image of somebody other than yourself, is that it creates an idea that that image, that person, is superior and you are inferior. Once you have a concept that begins to make you believe that you are not as good as other people, based upon the assumption we have already established, your actions follow your mind. If you have your mind set a certain

¹⁸ Peter J. Paris, The Social Teaching of the Black Churches (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), xiii.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Carter G. Woodson, Mis-Education of The Negro (Washington, DC: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1933; 1969 revised), xxxiii.

way, then your behavior follows precisely the program of your mind.²¹

Paulo Friere, Brazilian revolutionary and educator in his pivotal work Pedagogy of the Oppressed, speaks to the fear experienced from a duality of consciousness adapted to the structure of domination in which they [the oppressed] are immersed:

The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided. . .²²

Further:

The central problem is this: How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in the developing the pedagogy of their liberation? Only as they discover themselves to be the “host” of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy. As long as they live in the duality in which *to be is to be like*, and *to be like is to be like the oppressor*, this contribution is impossible. The pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressor are manifestations of dehumanization.²³

Gayraud Wilmore, an African American Presbyterian, and major scholar of black religious history and thought, argued the point differently. He believes that the black presence in the Presbyterian Church provides what DuBois called a “second-sight” on the Reformed faith that is filtered through an African American cultural tradition in order to render a black theology. He writes an introduction to

²¹ Na'im Akbar, Chains and Images of Psychological Slavery (Jersey City: Mind Production, 1984), 47.

²² Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Continuum, 1970), 32.

²³ Ibid. , 33.

Black Presbyterian history and theology in Black and Presbyterian: The Heritage and The Hope. In this fundamental work he argues that this paradox of “twoness” and of being Black and Presbyterian may also serve as a strength. He states:

It well may be that those who have experienced both sides of the color line in churches such as the Presbyterian have special resources and responsibilities not possessed by all members of the Black Church today. But the best utilization of those resources and the faithful discharge of those responsibilities will have to wait upon the crisis identity. . . . We need to discover what Esther discovered- that God does not want us to abandon our people and that we Black Presbyterians may have “come to the kingdom for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14) . . . that our strength may well come from the gift of being able to combine the best part of two cultures in a new life orientation, a new humanity, and overlaying the whole with an indomitable faith in God which is able to transcend the contradictions and delusions of all human existence.²⁴

African American Presbyterians, whether because of duality of consciousness, racism, sexism, classism, or a negative self image, have not seriously addressed the struggles of poor Black people in the United States. Moreover, African American Presbyterians appear to lack a self-conscious identity or a recognition of the gospel message grounded in the richness of African and African American culture and heritage. Such an identification would have transforming affect in terms of mission and ministry to African American communities.

The questions emerging out of this critique are: “Is it possible for African American Presbyterians to reclaim, unapologetically, their cultural and spiritual

²⁴ Gayraud S. Wilmore, Black and Presbyterian: The Heritage and the Hope (Philadelphia: Geneva Press), 84-85.

heritage?” What are the ultimate demands of an Afrocentric expression to the Gospel for the African American in the Presbyterian Church USA? What does it mean to be African and African American Christians in a European denomination? How does an African worldview enable African American Presbyterians to engage the black community? How these questions are addressed will have far reaching implications for developing a curriculum of urban theological education.

Scope of the Research

In this study the researcher endeavored to contextualize²⁵ the historical, biblical, theological, cultural and social implications of the Is This New Wine? Paper for curriculum purposes for African American Presbyterians and New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Contextualization of theological education implies:

. . . that the urban program *should be* situated, both administratively and programatically, in the context of ministry, the inner-city. Contextualization implies a commitment to the shalom of the city. This means that a program of theological education seeks to affirm the city as a locus of God’s redemptive activity. . . . The theology, curriculum, teaching methods, and academic policies are informed by the context of ministry (i.e., by the city and its constituencies). To be contextual means that the community has a sense of ownership over the program, both

²⁵ Stephen B. Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 1. defines “contextualization as a way of practicing theology in which one takes into account: the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the Christian people; the culture in which one is theologizing; and the social change in the culture, whether brought about by western technological process or the grass-roots struggle for equality, justice, and liberation.” Contextual theology refers to the specific location for examining the ways in which people give expression of their faith and resistance as understood in biblical terms from a historical and socio-cultural perspective. It is a good framework to analyze the missiological implications of the Is This New Wine? Paper for curriculum development of urban theological education in the revitalization of African American communities.

assisting institutions in designing the program as well as participating at all levels (i.e., faculty, staff, students).²⁶

The research began with theological education as context because of the belief that seminaries are critical in shaping the character of urban ministry into the next century. They are in the position of contributing to the empowerment, collaboration, and transformation of urban congregations and communities.

An argument is made throughout the research for asserting the Afrocentric idea²⁷ as a missiological “paradigm”²⁸--that bridges the theological academy and the community -- and Traditional African Religious teachings and beliefs expressed in history and in community as a core instructional response to the question “Is This New Wine?” Both are a way of understanding the Christian faith as praxis in a particular socio-religious reality borne out of the African-American experience. They emphasize the clear notion that this experience resides within the historical and always reforming context of the Reformed Tradition. Together, Traditional African Religious teaching and the Afrocentric

²⁶ Eldin Villafañe, taken from a newsletter program description entitled: Contextualized Urban Theological Education Program.

²⁷ See definition in this chapter on page 37.

²⁸ The term *paradigm* represents very distinct ways of understanding reality and raises particular set of questions that are only possible with their scope. It was introduced by Thomas Kuhn in his highly influential book, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). Kuhn shows how almost every significant break through in the field of scientific endeavor is first a break with tradition, with old ways of thinking and perceiving the world. Anne Wilson Schaef and Diane Fassel, The Addictive Organization, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), drawing on the work of Kuhn, define paradigm as the eruption of something that challenges and subsequently changes the rules. The Afrocentric paradigm becomes the means to convey a correction to the historical distortion of the European hegemony. Here paradigm is used to refer to a theological framework of interpretation that involves a break with certain basic assumptions and issues resulting in a European orientation. Missiology added to the definition of Afrocentrism in this work represents a paradigm shift to the praxis of African American theology. See also Stephen Bevans’ discussion of the Praxis model of contextual theology.

idea serve as *Missio dei* of urban theological education for the transformation of African American communities.

The Is This New Wine? Paper is contextual theology framed “anthropologically and pedagogically as a paradigm of praxis”.²⁹ It is a theological question steeped in the Reformed Tradition of the Presbyterian Church. It upholds the teachings of the church that underscores the centrality of scripture, the sovereignty of God, and our corporate responsibility in the socio-political structures of human affairs. It also challenges the Presbyterian Church to live up to these ideals with regard to its African-American sisters and brothers.

It does not begin as a *tabula rosa*, rather it critically values previous thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. It is a collaborative document composed to express solidarity with the African American community, and that places a premium on change, transformation, conversion, and future possibility. It is a visionary document that honors the past, respects the present and values the future.

Written didactically, dialectically and polemically to open up theological dialogue and self-critical discourse among African American Presbyterians about the nature of the African American predicament, the paper has achieved high visibility in a variety of church, community, and academic settings. It illustrates

²⁹ Bevans, 47-63. highlights five models for Contextual Theology: Translation, Anthropological, Praxis, Transcendental, and Synthetic. I have adapted two of the models to focus this research and ministry model. The Anthropological model is primarily concerned with the establishment and preservation of cultural identity by a person of Christian faith which will give rise to their own unique way of articulating faith. The praxis model focus of the identity of the Christian within a culture as that culture is understood in terms of social change. The overall aim is to appropriate the pedagogical motifs for theological discernment of God’s self disclosure and God’s self revelation in urban communities.

the urgency of the crisis, and the need for a collaborative forum to think clearly and strategically about appropriate resolutions.

The point of raising the question “Is This New Wine?” within the Presbyterian Church USA is the state of crisis in the Black community: high percentage of black female-head of household, out-of-wedlock teenage pregnancy, school dropouts, welfare dependency, record-rate unemployment, and youth violent crimes. The crisis is further precipitated by the shifting economic realities of the workplace in terms of its dislocation from core inner cities, emerging information technology requiring advance education and greater diagnostic skills. Added to all of these pathologies is the epidemic of HIV/AIDS, emergence of a permanent African American underclass, African American men in prison, and a drug-infested culture that has the potential to virtually destroy an entire generation of young African Americans.

Wilson elaborates the above point:

Although drug addiction and its attendant violence, AIDS and its toll on public health resources, and homelessness are found in many American communities, their impact on the ghetto is profound. These communities, whose residents have been pushed to the margins of society, have few resources with which to combat these social ills that arose in the 1980s. Fiscally strapped cities have watched helplessly as these problems-exacerbated by the new poverty, the decline of social organization in the jobless neighborhoods, and the reduction of social services-have made the city at large seem a dangerous and threatening place in which to live. Accordingly, working-and middle-class urban residents continue to relocate in the suburbs. Thus, while joblessness and related social problems are on the rise in inner-city neighborhoods, especially in those that represent the new poverty areas, the larger city has fewer resources with which to combat them.³⁰

³⁰ Wilson, 49.

The thesis of the Is This New Wine? Paper is in partial response to the challenge put forth by the Kelly Miller Smith Institute on African American Church Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School (October, 1992) in the statement that follows:

The African American Church is in crisis. At a time in history when we are about to enter a new millennium, the African American Church stands at the crossroads of decision. Its traditional role as the conservator of Black culture and the conscience of the Black community is at stake. It must choose either life or death, blessings or curses. Whatever choice it makes will determine whether we and our descendants will live as a redeemed and redeeming community in this land where God has befriended us.³¹

In its literal form the paper is a community-constituting and community-defining document. This defining-constituting characteristic makes it a public theological document that seeks a public acceptance. It advocates for consistent visibility in the sacred space and place of the Black church and the Black community. It positively encourages thought and action, faith and faithfulness as a method of discourse.

Is This New Wine? is a call for a revival of the historic mission of the Presbyterian church in neglected neighborhoods of cities, as well as for starting new ministries among the poor and grassroots organizations. It is a clarion call to reflect theologically and practically on a new urban reality. This new reality calls for a more appropriate biblical hermeneutic that is a more vivid identification with the cultural roots in African and African American history. More specifically, the

³¹ The Kelly Miller Smith Institute, What Does It Mean to Be Black and Christian (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Divinity School. October, 1992), 1-2.

paper is a response to the historical, cultural, structural and theological marginalization of African American Presbyterians in the Presbyterian Church USA. It forces African American Presbyterians to grapple with theological questions of their identity by asking and answering the questions: “Who are we? Why are we what we are? Where are we going? and What are we going to do about it as we enter the 21st century?”

The theological implication for these four questions merits attention considering the social, political, historical, cultural and global context in which African American Presbyterians wrestle with what it means to be Black and Presbyterian. One could argue that the question of being Black is separated from the question of being Presbyterian. Herein lies the crux of the paradox for African American Presbyterians.

The paper also requires a prophetic response of Black Presbyterian leadership. It is a call for justice in the church and community sent forth louder and clearer than before. It calls for a complete break with the integrationist and accommodationist mentality of the past at the expense of the welfare of Black communities. In this instance, it follows the historical tradition of the Black church in the context of separation and protest. And it calls for the kind of response that the prophet Jeremiah had when he tried to keep silent. It was the burning fire shut up in his bones that made it more burdensome for him to remain silent than to speak the word of God (Jer. 20:9, NRSV).

With a few exceptions, there is the belief that the Presbyterian Church USA has abandoned its mission and ministry to the city. Increasingly, ministries related to urban poverty, crime, education, church development and redevelopment among persons of color have been restricted. Added to the above, diminishing financial resources, emphasis on gaining or retaining white members, programs targeted to help address urban needs frequently have been forced to compete for limited funds and personnel in ways that are sometimes mutually destructive.

In an earlier report that framed the genesis of the Is This New Wine? Paper, Ronald Peters stated:

The status of the African American witness to the love and liberation of Jesus Christ within the Presbyterian Church today is far from reaching its potential to address critical issues within the black community at large. A range of socio-political, criminal justice, health, education, and economic concerns, as well as spiritual challenges continue to adversely affect African American communities throughout our nation. What does the spiritual heritage of Black Presbyterianism, and more importantly, the Black Presbyterian congregational witness today has to say to these concerns? "Is there a balm in Gilead?"³²

Beginning, as it did, in 1993 as an outgrowth of the Presbyterian General Assembly's emphasis on evangelism, the paper calls on African American

³² Ron Peters, The Balm in Gilead Report: A Mission Challenge to Enhance African American Congregational Life and Leadership Empowerment within Our Denomination presented to the African American Advisory Committee in Long Boat Key, Florida, December, 10-12, 1990. The challenge and mission statement for this advisory committee, acting in solidarity and cooperation with black staff, pastors, and lay leaders across the church, is to advocate for and empower African American congregational life and leadership within the Presbyterian denomination and the larger society. This mission included: 1) Enabling Black Presbyterians to reclaim their inner convictions about liberation, justice, and fulfillment as revealed by the biblical witness of God's grace and love; 2) Strengthen the vision, hope, and action of black Presbyterians to work collectively with other leaders in the black community for the liberation and well being of the total black community.

Presbyterians to prayer, study and action over a seven year period. More specifically, it contains a mandate for critical urban theological education. It is an emancipatory document which acknowledges: 1) that the African American community as a whole is in a state of crisis that seriously jeopardizes its future as a people; 2) that the African American community appears to be ill prepared theologically and spiritually to deal with the crisis; 3) that the historic self perceptions of African American Presbyterians (as elitist and middle-class in orientation) and their perception of the African American community, and vice versa have complicated the task of engaging the crisis; and 4) that the validity of the notion of an independent African Presbyterian Church in America that more favorably affirms their cultural identity and heritage be reconsidered.

Three theological propositions framed the paper for study, prayer, and action. First, in this researcher's judgment the Is This New Wine? document is essentially borne of a perceived call by God to share the Good News of Jesus Christ within the socio-religious context of an African-centered world view. Such a focus will more effectively empower African Americans to realize their God-given potential for health, wholeness, spiritual and personal transformation, and the establishment of authentic personhood.

Second, the paper lifts up the challenge faced by African American Presbyterians today as described by missiologist Marsha S. Haney:

Because of our professed belief in the "One, holy, universal, apostolic church, we join committed Christians throughout the Diaspora (be they in Africa, Brazil, the Caribbean, or Australia) in asking key questions concerning discipleship and ministry. . . . 1. What shape will our Christian obedience take? 2. What kind of

theological reflection is appropriate to the obedience? 3. How do we (as African American Christians) understand the command to follow Christ into 21st century?³³

Third, the paper offers a strategic theological framework to empower African Americans through a curriculum of urban theological education by addressing the social and spiritual crisis in the community. And it affirms Afrocentrism as the defining paradigm for African American Presbyterians involvement in the urban mission field. It calls for a collective form of leadership in church and community that share a common vision of empowerment and transformation.

Finally, the paper implies that African American Presbyterians no longer provide key leadership in the community (the kind once enjoyed because of their educated status and their assimilationist ideology). Their middle-class values have complicated their ability to address the oppressed conditions of poor people, and prohibit them from responding to the Call of God.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this critical research is three fold: 1) to describe through an urban ethnographic research method the teaching and spiritual capacity of the Black community to define, sustain, and transform itself in times of crisis; 2) to describe the way in which those basic communal values culminate in a distinctive principle of social cohesion which form the core pedagogy of African American religious experience; and 3) based on the results of the research, explore 'core'

³³ New Wine Paper, 3.

theological and pedagogical themes for a curriculum for “urban adult learner”³⁴ that would bridge the gulf between the academy, the church, and the grassroots urban community. This bridging medium [the curriculum] is the shared revelation of God’s self disclosure in everyday experiences through critical reflection.

At the core of this research is the underlying theme of the role spirituality plays in the praxis of faith. It seeks, in other words, to discern the narratives of “faith and resistance” rooted in the experience of the Black community. Moreover, it seeks to build a systematic understanding of how grassroots urban adult learners give articulation to the providence and justice of God in oppressed situations. It seeks to document the trinitarian realities of the academy, church, and community describing those realities in their own terms, thereby, providing a correction to the assumption of theological deficit in the Black church and community that arise in western theological discourse and the current Black theological debate.

The researcher drew specifically from critical ethnography that challenges existing research, planning and public policy decisions that affect the urban quality of life. According to John Creswell, critical “ethnographers attempt to aid emancipatory goals, negate repressive influences, raise consciousness, and invoke a call to action that potentially will lead to social change”.³⁵ Moreover, “the logic

³⁴ The past ten years have produced a number of studies on the learning behavior of the adult. Stephen Brookfield, Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning: A Comprehensive Analysis of Principle and Effective Practice (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986); Laurent Dalo, Effective Teaching and Mentoring: Realizing the Transformation Power of Adult Learning Experiences (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986) Janet Fishburn, Leading: Paidea in a New Key. In Congregations: Their Powers to form and Transform, ed., Ellis Nelson (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1988).

³⁵ John W. Creswell, Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 11.

of the design (the methodology) is inductive, developing a story or pattern from detailed categories or themes that emerges into a design”.³⁶ The design itself is not a static one, nor is it predetermined before the study begins.

The present state of theological education and the African American churches in inner-city neighborhoods presume a lack of capacity and know-how to respond to the crisis of urban communities. This is of particular significance for African American Presbyterians. An examination of the spiritual and teaching capacity of the Black church and urban adult learners within an urban context provided a case example for curriculum development and mission outreach. With a new appreciation of how God is discerned and articulated beyond the walls of the academy and the church, the critical question that comes to mind is what would an authentic and relevant model of urban theological education look like? The goal of this study, then, was toward an Afrocentric urban theological curriculum of the grassroots in response to the question: “Is This New Wine?”

Significance of the Study

A 21st century conversation of contextual urban theological education in its trinitarian relationship of academy, church and community is significant to this investigation. This trinitarian view presents a distinct challenge to the notion of learning, curricula development and the praxis of urban ministry in the Black community. More particularly, how African and African American Presbyterian core religious values are contrasted to that of Euro-American Presbyterian's is a

³⁶ Ibid. , 44.

21st century discussion worthy of dialogue, opening with the question, “Is This New Wine?” Up to this time, the focus of urban theological education has not taken seriously the socio-religious and systemic critique of the African American church and community.

The curricula debate in North American theological education in the future must consider the trinitarian conversation of urban ministry. The shift presented here, however, moves from a traditional campus based learning paradigm with its concentration in Greek philosophical tenets to an emphasis on non-campus based learning that values the faith stories of the people. Such a discussion reaches into the depth of African philosophy and religion prior to Greek civilization, and carries over into the African American religious experience as instructions to the community’s understanding of itself and its relationship to God.

It also argued for more research and a rethinking of basic premises of theological education. In the case of this study, the community becomes the center of theological exploration and learning that is mutually beneficial to the church and the academy. It places a premium on linking the faith lessons of the past from one generation to another as theological education and ministry. Not only is this a timely conversation, it is a discussion presumably without precedence.

The significance of this inquiry is the contribution it makes to the existing body of knowledge of urban theological education. It also offers a framework analyzing the systemic limits imposed on the revitalization efforts of African

American Presbyterian congregations and urban grassroots communities. A review of the literature over a period of five decades indicated a marked change in the approach to urban theological education. The last ten years have seen a plethora of literary contributions on urban ministry and adult continuing education. As strategic as these contributions suggest, they have not manifested systematic changes in the classical disciplines of theological education.

The challenge, then, of Afrocentrism in urban theological education moves the discussion of classical theological education to a more centric level calling into question the validity of a European- centered hegemony of theological discourse. From the perspective of the Black church, Afrocentrism has identified key cultural and religious issues that African American Presbyterian congregations must struggle to address if they are to serve faithfully within the urban community. By the same token Afrocentricity challenges seminaries to acknowledge the theological sophistication of urban adult learners in their ability to define, sustain, and transform their reality beyond the esoteric doctrines of the academy. The community is significant to this Afrocentric discussion because it represents a new approach to theological education that places a premium on learning, collaboration, dialogue and the culture and religious voice of grassroots people in discerning the liberative motifs of God.

When this project is completed it is this writer's expected outcome to make a contribution to the emerging field of urban theological education. The curriculum outcome hopefully will have an impact on urban curricula in church

and community, and more specifically of the curriculum of New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

Questions, Objectives, and Hypotheses

Questions:

The four crucial research questions that underscore this study are designed to listen to the faith stories of the community. They provided the impetus for the discussion in each of the eight sessions conducted in an experimental course in a non-traditional classroom within the community and among grassroots interviewees. These four questions are intended to elicit a personal faith response of the interviewee's life experiences that discern theologically the providence and omnipresence of God. Moreover, they are constructed for curriculum development.

1. How do you experience or not experience the presence of God in your personal crisis and the crisis of the black community?
2. What are the faith stories of the community?
3. What are the faith stories of caring and sharing?
4. What are the stories relating to the spirituality of the community?

Objective:

In order to achieve the stated curriculum purpose: Afrocentrism, Traditional African Religious values, principles of urban theological education (empowerment, collaboration, and transformation), and land-use planning paradigms were incorporated to address the crisis in a specific locale.

Hypotheses:

There is a lack of a relevant urban ministry curriculum in theological education that validates 'urban ministry' and that addresses the systemic needs of the urban populace. This is why the seminary and the Black church have been ineffective in the expansion of Black liberation theologies in poor grassroots communities. As a result, the Black church and the Black community are in crisis. This becomes evident in the visible absence of clergy and lay leadership in both the church and the community to address these concerns in a public and systematic way.

Assumptions

1. The gulf between the seminary, church, and community exist because African American clergy and lay persons are not equipped to provide Afrocentric leadership knowledgeable of urban systems; and they are unable to translate biblical and theological language and images on a grassroots community level;
2. Effective theological education for urban ministry cannot be exclusively campus-based;
3. Many African American Presbyterian pastors and lay persons are unable to bridge the language, attitudes and images of the community.

Justification:

There is a clear need on the part of New Brunswick Theological Seminary and the African American Presbyterian Church to engage in curriculum dialogue with grassroots community persons and other groups as a way of learning about the theology and pedagogy that sustain, define, and transform the community

experiencing systemic oppression. The Is This New Wine? Paper provided the researcher with the needed impetus for investigating the extraordinary religious history and heritage of faith and resistance of the African American community. Plus, there is the clear indication for a curriculum that empowers African American Presbyterian Churches and communities to systemically address the crisis as articulated in the Is This New Wine? Paper.

Thesis:

1. A primary thesis of this research is that the urban ministry context provides an appropriate culturally-specific learning environment for theological education to explore and discern the self-revelation and self-disclosure of God's presence; and it is a place where the grassroots spirituality of adult learners are focused. This model of culturally-specific learning differs from all others. Its very essence enables African Americans to face, confront, and transcend spiritually their social, political, and spiritual condition. The African American urban community possesses the religious and teaching capacity rooted in its African heritage to define, sustain, and transform the community as it faces the most devastating crisis since our enslavement.

Summary:

For these reasons a curriculum of urban theological education at the grassroots level is as imperative for the church as it is for the community. The Is This New Wine? Paper was introduced as a framework for understanding the crisis faced by African American Presbyterians and that is faced in the African American urban community. The problem of blending theory and practice in

theological education in today's urban context is justification for the academy in engaging in a curriculum dialogue with the church and grassroots community persons about their belief in God to define their reality, and sustain their faith as they work to transform the circumstance. What follows is a thorough definition of urban theological education and Afrocentricity for the purpose of curriculum development.

Matters of Definition

The expanding urban context brings new and perplexing questions about words and concepts. By examining the emerging language and concepts of urban ministry one can engage the paradigm shift necessary for ministry in a new urban millennium. Urban theological education and Afrocentricity are two key terms deserving attention that frame the core values of this research. They are identified within this discourse to help ensure clarity of understanding about the nuance of their meaning. Unless a clear and careful explanation is given to their definition and meaning, confusion may occur.

Moreover, these terms are significant due to their being subject to controversy within their respective colloquium. A common definition and understanding of their meanings produce a shared language for the reader. The integration of terms from other disciplines allowed this writer to borrow and reframe the inherent theses for their ultimate purpose. [Terms requiring less extensive clarification are incorporated within the text as footnotes.]

Defining Urban Theological Education

By standard definition the term “metro urban” refers to a metropolitan area that has a core city population of 50,000 or more according to the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Analysis (SMSA) with surrounding suburban area that relates economically to it. Beyond simply signifying a population threshold, “urban” suggests the deeper connotation of an environment that is multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, multi-racial, and economically diverse. Cities are arenas for complicated interaction between economics, physical structures, information networks, a system of social organizations, and collective human communities. “Urbanization” refers to the ever growing phenomenon around the globe in which people are migrating to urban centers, thereby, increasing their geographic area, i.e. “sprawl”, political importance, cultural impact, and economic vulnerability. In 1960, for example, the United States had 136 cities with population over 100,000 and in 1990 it increased to 194 cities.

Contextually, “urban ministry”, refers to a theological understanding of the life and work of the church in core city communities, but also includes neighborhoods and suburbs, as they are economically related to cities and experiencing similar patterns of population density and diversity. Urban ministry, therefore, has to be both intensely local in its focus as well as metropolitan in orientation for understanding and addressing larger issues. It is at once encompassing of the vitality of congregational life and the intentional engagement within its context. It is difficult to extricate the pastoral care of members who live

in substandard housing, for example, from mission strategies that include community economic development. At the base is a theology of mission in which the Gospel is proclaimed in community and made manifest with it.

This then becomes the task of “urban theological education”: to ground leaders in solid biblical and theological study that will clarify their missional theology and commitment. Rather, than removing them from the context for the purpose of theological education, only to reinsert them at the conclusion of their training and leave the responsibility on the student to integrate their theology with the urban reality, the very process of theological education needs to take place more intentionally in dialogue with the urban context. Thus, it is missiological, contextual, structural, theological, and pedagogical.

It requires greater mastery, discipline and leadership as its central modality. Additionally, given the complex nature of the city and the calling of the church to be effective in witness and ministry, theological education includes exposure and competence in a number of areas of effective analysis and organization. This means that it is interdisciplinary in nature and could include such fields of endeavor coming together as urban sociology, planning, administration, public policy, social welfare, economics, and community organization, selected and integrated in a paradigm of reflection and engagement. It is a process of teaching and learning about the nuance of systemic change in both the church and the community.

The pedagogical commitment is a process of learning and doing, research and reflection in conjunction with the practice of ministry. It is the cultivation of passionate, prophetic leadership to advance the effectiveness of ministry in urban settings. Its methodology is dialectical and dialogical, interdependent and interdisciplinary. As an educational value it affirms multi-cultural diversity and the value of collaboration, transformation and empowering approaches to theology.

The goal of urban theological education is the cultivation of passionate and effective leadership for ministry in cities—from the smaller and mid-sizes cities to the mega-metropolises. Its approach to theology and from any Christian tradition, is necessarily one of empowerment and transformation. Those who come through it must be able to both provide pastoral care and do social analysis, while recognizing the relationship between the two. Urban theological education is not exclusive of pastor, however. This recognition of the potential of priesthood of all believers should not dilute the process of theological training, but, in fact, enrich it.

Urban ministry, then, is not a commentary or pronouncement of the urban predicament. Rather urban ministry is the systematic study and knowledge of those interlocking systems that prevent persons from experiencing productive urban living. It is a comprehensive and systematic approach to the problems facing urban America, bringing together the collective energy, resources, and thinking of every entity affecting urban life. Hence, urban ministry is no single

approach or method. This is of particular importance when we consider the magnitude of problems in the city.

Thus, as we enter the twenty-first century, authentic urban ministry in urban context (s) presents some of the most complex and challenging opportunities for seminaries, pastors, and congregation. This means that for urban theological education to be authentic in its engagement and reflection it must be theoretical, missional, liberational, spiritual, multicultural, womanist, Afrocentric, prophetic, collaborative, empowering, and transformative. Any one or combination of these composite can become paradigmatic for examining a particular urban phenomenon.

Defining Afrocentrism

This research ascribes a fundamental curricula importance to the phenomenology of Afrocentricity. That is why it is necessary to frame a definition that would provide the reader with an understanding of the comprehensiveness of the Is This New Wine? Paper. The last five hundred years of world history have been devastating for the acquisition of knowledge about other than European culture and history. Thus, African American Presbyterians need to reclaim the negative and the positive of their African past before converting to the Presbyterian system of belief as further response to the conditions of racism that have maligned, omitted, and distorted our images and culture as important contributions. Black Presbyterians no longer have to view

themselves from the cultural perspective and history of the majority of Presbyterians.

Afrocentricity emerged out of the African American struggle for justice and liberation in America. Over the last thirty years it has become a powerful pedagogical paradigm at both the academic and community level. It is a reality that can no longer be ignored or denied by the Black church or theological education institutions. J. Deotis Roberts writing in The Prophethood of Black Believers gives credence to its potential to take African Americans beyond where Black theology has taken them during the last thirty years. He states: "Blacks can now value their heritage, not as one of oppression in the United States, but as one of noble ancestry before their American sojourn and, indeed, independent of it."³⁷

As a critical lens from which to access the crisis of the Black community and the African American Presbyterians involvement in it, Afrocentricity as an expression of faith in God refers to a spiritual and missiological approach to the ordering of church life (celebration, education, administration, nurture, community outreach, stewardship). It also emphasizes the centrality of African values and beliefs grounded in a method of "reflection and praxis"³⁸ as a valid

³⁷ J. Deotis Roberts, The Prophethood of Black Believers: An African American Political Theology for Ministry (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 134.

³⁸ Reflection and Praxis begin with the premise that African Americans are called to be co-conspirators with God in God's liberating activity in the black community. The Black Church is called to be the missiological agent of change who works for just relations within, and justice for, the black community as a command of God. The academy is the repository of ideas and thought to be tested in the church and community. This study argues that effective urban theological education requires that praxis be concurrent with theological reflection and social analysis. Responsible praxis (action in reflection and vice-versa) is necessary for discerning a deeper theological underpinning in the community that demands theological renewal of praxis in the social ministry of the black church. It [Reflection and Praxis] is the principle theological and pedagogical method for a socio-cultural analysis of the context in which the ministry is explored and performed. It is inserted in the definition as way of doing theology and increasing competence for an effective liberative ministry. The goal is to discover the church and community's cultural and

framework for the transformation of African American churches and communities. It affirms that the story of African Americans did not begin with the heritage of enslavement in America, but rather with the heritage of ancient Africa. And it serves as a framework for uniting the Black Christian story with the biblical story of liberation and freedom under God. Thus, Afrocentrism is the paradigm shift in which ministry and mission is discussed, affirmed and implemented. It is the beginning of a new approach to doing contextual theology.

By lifting up Afrocentrism as a method of exploration, the centrality of African ideas, beliefs, and values as valid frames of reference for acquiring and examining historical and biblical data for truth and accuracy is established. It, then, becomes the composite montage of specific ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, which is peculiar to African Americans in general, and African American Presbyterians in particular as distinguished from other groups.

Afrocentrism is a public mandate for Africans, and African Americans to dialogue about certain kinds of theological presumptuousness. It is a significant public challenge to western theological presumptions that come out of fields such as systematic theology, church history, and biblical interpretation. This public

theological convictions in a dialogical critique of the stories and visions of itself in the context of urbanization. Through this non-traditional research approach, the Afrocentric idea is then filtered and explained through a singular lens. Moreover, it provides a framework for a more accurate analysis that is multi-disciplinary, holistic, thematic, and contextual to the particular ministry. The aim is to discover collectively (through action research) in community the heritage of faith and resistance, and history of persons of African descent. Reclaiming the vestiges of African belief and values is an important pedagogical thesis. A second goal is to name, claim and reclaim the present meaning of ministry and its importance to the community. It starts with the basic questions: What is God doing here and now? Why have you become involved in this kind of ministry? The origins of reflection and action can be discerned in the African mode of philosophy that embraces knowing as participatory. Since the community is central to the African world view, then active participation in naming the community's reality is primary.

challenge takes seriously an examination of African American psycho-social self imagery, community spirituality, Black male and female relationships, African ancestry and the whole history of the African continent. The fundamental role of this public challenge-- distinct from, yet building on, the indispensable work of academics, experts, analysts, and pundits-- is to create and sustain high-quality public discourse addressing urgent community problems which enlightens and energizes African Americans, prompting them to take public action.

Afrocentrism as a cultural paradigm in the Black liberation struggle is becoming prominent in the evolution of Black theology and more urgently among the new generation of African American theologians. It asserts a cultural principle that encourages African Americans to move towards unity and self-determination. Thus, the most challenging concept of the Is This New Wine? Paper is the "Afrocentric Idea".³⁹ It represents a "metanoia"⁴⁰ shift in the thinking among most contemporary African American leadership in the Presbyterian

³⁹ Molefi Kete Asante, The Afrocentric Idea (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987). In this major work Asante explains the influence of the Judeo-Christian tenets in his understanding of Afrocentricity. Linked to Western religious values, Asante stresses the cultural and spiritual relatedness of African and African Americans. He asserts the need for a cultural reconstruction that incorporates the African perspective as a part of an entire human transformation. See also Carolyn Calloway-Thomas "Hearing Voices of the Ancestors: Religious Themes in The Afrocentric Idea"; and Jeffery Lynn Woodyard, "Locating Asante: Making Use of The Afrocentric Idea." Dhyana Ziegler, ed. Molefi Kete Asante and Afrocentricity: In Praise and in Criticism (Nashville: Winston Publishing, 1995).

⁴⁰ The word "metanoia" means a shift of mind. For the Greeks, it meant a fundamental shift or change, or more literally transcendence ("meta"- above or beyond, as in "metaphysics") of mind ("noia," from the root "nous," of mind). In the early (Gnostic) Christian tradition, it took on a special meaning of awakening shared intuition and direct knowing of the highest, of God. See Peter M. Senge, The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization (New York: DoubleDay, 1990), 13. To grasp its' meaning is to comprehend the deeper meaning of Afrocentrism, for it also involves a fundamental shift or movement of the mind. Stated theologically, Afrocentrism involves conversion. Meaning a shift from one paradigm to another. Afrocentrism involves a transformation in our perspective, a change in our thinking through which we make sense of reality.

system. At the same time the level of influence Afrocentrism is exerting on the thinking and conduct of the masses of African descendants is unprecedented.

Afrocentrism represents a new cultural consciousness in the African American community that is dynamic, spiritual, and revitalizing. This resurgence of cultural authentication is challenging African Americans to search out and reclaim the African presence in the Bible and their ancestral roots in Africa. It is this phenomenon that makes the Is This New Wine? Paper worth examining as a theological project. The paper advances the Afrocentric dialogue more concretely to specific outcomes that is beneficial to the African American community.

Afrocentrism empowers African American Presbyterians to dialogue about their mission and ministry, and to assert themselves in dedication to God, to their ancestors, and to their progenies for effective community transformation. As such, Afrocentrism becomes the source of regeneration for our “core values and beliefs”⁴¹ grounded in a method of inquiry and discovery in community. This is key to the reflection and praxis methodology on the one hand for the academy and the church, and on the other hand, action proceeds reflection as method of refinement in the community. In both instances, it establishes Africa as the

⁴¹ Henry Mitchell and Nicholas Cooper-Lewter Soul Theology: The Heart of American Black Culture (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 3. The authors spend a great deal of time exploring the legacy of the African American belief system as vestiges of African religious ideal, values and beliefs that severed as part of the attitudes of survival that govern our behavior and relationships, even our relationship with God. They describe these “core beliefs” as “informed theological statements that suggest that people who grew up in the traditional black community are simultaneously equipped with bedrock attitudes that govern all deliberate behavior and relationships and also all spontaneous response to crisis.”

anthropological, pedagogical and theological center for acquiring and examining historical and biblical data for truth and accuracy.

This perspective reverses the western world view and becomes transcendental making Africa the Subject rather than the object of all inquiry and investigation. It makes no claim to be superior over persons of other races, religions, cultures or world views. It suggests only that less attention and energy be spent on what the white Presbyterian Church (USA) is doing or not doing, and more focus be placed on African descendants in America. In the end, from the viewpoint of this writer, Afrocentrism must be open to self-critique from within its bounds and outside of them so as to determine both merit and fault.

Moreover, Afrocentrism contextually has become for this writer an essential missiological, anthropological, praxisological, pedagogical, and theological framework for public discourse in both the church and the community. These five modalities are what constitute the theological framework of this research.

Molefi Kete Asante, of Temple University, who codified the Afrocentric movement and school of thought and who is generally recognized as the individual who first popularized the term for use in a variety of academic and urban settings, and who authored of three defining books on the subject: *Afrocentricity* (1980), *The Afrocentric Idea* (1987), and *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (1990) defines:

Afrocentricity is the belief in the centrality of Africans in post modern history. It is our history, our mythology, our creative motif, and our ethos exemplifying our collective will. Further, Afrocentricity reorganized our frame of reference so that we become the center of analysis and synthesis. As such, it becomes

the source of regeneration of values and beliefs necessary for the revitalization of African American communities.⁴²

The main objectives of Afrocentric scholars like Asante, Diop, Karenga, Nobles, Meyers and others are to liberate the research and study of African people from the domination of Western scholarship, whose concepts, history, and traditions have been the measurement against which all other cultures were evaluated. Afrocentric principles become the new paradigm by which research standards are established and evaluated.

For African American Presbyterians, Afrocentrism challenges them to reclaim the negative and positive of their African and African American past, prior to converting to the Reformed Faith. Thus, Afrocentrism is one method by which African American Presbyterians can reclaim their cultural, historical, and spiritual heritage as a means of more effectively relating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the challenges faced by the wider African American community today.

The antecedents of the Afrocentric Idea begins with African American Presbyterians like Henry Highland Garnet(1815-1882), Edward Wilmont Blyden(1832-1912), and other historic figures like Alexander Crumwell (1819-1898), and W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963) who centered their analysis of the African American predicament with exemplary intellect, commitment, and courage. They exhibited the kind of superior thinking and leadership that served to establish the paradigmatic strategy essential for the African American community today. So, as we examine the historical and theological implications

⁴² Molefi kete Asante, Afrocentricity (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1989), 6-39.

of Is This New Wine?, the one question that needs to be asked is: Is it possible that Afrocentricity is the missing link to bridging the Black community and the Black church?

Finally, the Afrocentric paradigm is a concept of going back to a tradition that can point the way toward a culturally relevant and productive future. Through a singular lens, it becomes the method by which all understanding is filtered and explained. It becomes the means to convey several meanings: i.e., to correct the historical distortions from Eurocentric paradigms; and to provide a framework for a more accurate world history that is multi-disciplinary, holistic, thematic, and contextual of African and African American culture.

Delimitations

This research was delimited to one theological educational institution, one African American Presbyterian church, and a neighborhood community economic development center through proper investigative procedures due to limitations of time and cost. Grassroots residential participation was subsequently delimited by a less than aggressive outreach in the community due to time constraints placed on faculty, staff, and students. Moreover, the study was delimited to the degree of student participation and the course registration policy governing trimesters at New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

Limitations

Every research study, whether of a qualitative or quantitative nature, is bound by limitations. Barbara Kraynyak Luise, describes the limitations of

qualitative methodology in her An Ethnographic Study of Homeless Families:

Life in a Shelter. She writes:

Only recently in the disciplines of sociology, education, and nursing has the use of qualitative methodology been accepted as a means of scientific research. For years, scientific inquiry was synonymous with instrumentation and not observation. Because of this, many people questioned the validity and possible generalization of the research findings. Today it is generally accepted that qualitative research, if done well, can be and often is as rigorous and scientifically sound as quantitative research.⁴³

The limitations associated with this study also noted by Bogdan and Biklen are those found in all types of qualitative methodology. They state that “because of the prolonged and close contact with those being studied, each person doing ethnographic research must be aware that one’s own prejudices and biases may have an effect on the data collected.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, “qualitative studies are not impressionistic essays made after a quick visit to a setting”; rather they become scientific studies only after the researcher has spent an increased amount of time in the setting gathering data through the elaborate taking of field notes.⁴⁵ Also, strict adherence to a data collection protocol helps to decrease the investigator’s bias.

A basic limitation of this research lies in the size of the groups representing the academy, the church, and the community. *The City as Text* course offered

⁴³ Barbara Kraynyak Luise, An Ethnography of Homeless Families: Life in a Shelter (Ed. Rutgers University: A Dissertation 1995), 209.

⁴⁴ R. Bogdan, and S. Bilken, Qualitative Research For Education (Boston: Allyn and Bacon Company, 1992), 46.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 47.

through New Brunswick Theological Seminary served to frame the research design and the level of participation. Eight weeks of the course was designed to engage each constituent group (students from the seminary, representatives from the church and community) in a disciplined dialogue of urban and theological issues. The research was also challenged by the availability of community persons to attend the regular scheduled sessions. As such, the class was without benefit of a comprehensive dialogue with the community.

A second limitation of the research is that there is very little written material on the subject of urban theological education that integrates theory and practice as a means of bridging the theological and pedagogical gulf between the academy, the church and the grassroots community. This is particularly true when associated with Afrocentricity and the African American community.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Urban Ministry Curricula History

*"If you don't know where you are going,
you won't recognize it when you get there."
"One becomes a leader by doing the work of a leader"*
Proverbs

What movements or undertakings are significant because of the lessons they teach us about urban theological education? In the last several years similar questions to that raised in the Is This New Wine? Paper for African American Presbyterians have surfaced among African Americans in other mainline denominations. The review of the literature suggests that African American Christians in these denominations are struggling with issues of theology, polity, culture, and tradition with regard to their benefit and contribution to African American religious core values.¹

Similarly, conversations about the significance of Afrocentrism and Traditional African Religion in the Black church have also emerged creating an atmosphere for rethinking the European hegemony of Christianity; and thereby, making it possible for a more African-centered discussion. This emerging consciousness of Afrocentrism borne of the latter half of the twentieth century out

¹ Harold T. Lewis, Yet with a Steady Beat: The African American Struggle for Recognition in the Episcopal Church (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996); William B. McClain, Black People in the Methodist Church: Whither Thou Goest? (Nashville: Abington Press, 1984); Mark D. Morrisison-Reed, Black Pioneers in a White Denomination (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

of the enslaved African experience in North America and the historical and cultural influence of Africa has found validity among African American theologians and Black church leaders in a profound way.

The issues of curricula reform and urban theological education, it could be argued, are more pronounced in evangelical literature than among mainline Protestants. The writings of Benjamin Tommie, Ray Bakke, Robert Linthicum, Harold Recinos, and Eldin Villafañe² have provided a more global theological framework that address the wider implications of urban mission and ministry. Linthicum, for example, contributes a biblical hermeneutic in City of God/ City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church.

On the other hand, the notion of bridging the theological and pedagogical gulf between the African American church, the academy, and the community is becoming part of the debate in mainline Protestant academies. Both realms of discussion are receiving extensive attention by some of the progenitors of Black theology and the most recent generation of African American theologians.

This research and literary review raises four areas for consideration: 1) Urban ministry as a discipline is becoming an important discourse in the sphere of theological education; 2) Black Presbyterian history is a vehicle for curriculum development inside and outside of the academy; 3) Afrocentricity is becoming a

² Benjamin Tonna, Gospel for the Cities: A Socio-Theology of Urban Ministry (New York: Orbis Books, 1985); Raymond Bakke, The Urban Christian: Effective Ministry in Today's Urban World (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1987); Robert C. Linthicum, City of God/City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991); Harold J. Recinos, Jesus Weeps: Global Encounters On Our Doorstep (Nashville: Abington Press, 1992); Eldin Villafañe, Seek The Peace Of The City: Reflection on Urban Ministry (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, Publishing Co., 1995).

valid paradigm for investigating urban issues and participating in debate; and 4) Leadership as a criterion is key to the scholarship and practice of urban ministry.

The formulation of an urban theological education core curriculum as a model of ministry in response to the question, “Is This New Wine?” relies heavily on what has occurred significantly in the past. The review of diverse literature on the subject of urban theological education has given shape to the theological and practical thoughts of this writer’s investigation. These sources do interrelate and compliment each other as they echo similar critiques and observations about urban ministry today. They share a common interest in empowerment, collaboration, and transformation as prescribed principles of urban theological education.

Since this research focuses on bridging the divine and moral gulf between the academy, church, and community, the writer has organized the contributing works of these scholars by the area of interest in which they impact the research. They are: urban ministry curricula history, Afrocentrism, and leadership. Each area contributes significantly to the curricula formation of this study.

There is much to be learned from historical efforts to address urban realities in theory and practice in theological education. Since World War II, theological education has ebbed and flowed in its ability to prepare persons for ministry in cities. Mainline curricula have for the most part patterned or followed the dictates of suburban ministries, focusing primarily on the professional clergy model. Such

a model emphasizes a managerial approach to organization and maintenance of the church from the inside.

A literary review also indicates that the last fifty years have been critical in the shaping and reshaping of urban ministry as a discipline of theological education in the United States. This curricula history is crucial for the discernment of new learning approaches to urban theological education. Clifford Green provides an insightful critique of the guiding paradigms that have shaped urban ministry since World War II in his work Churches, Cities, and Human Communities: Urban Ministry in the United States 1945-1985. He raises three significant questions for framing a historical investigation: 1) What has the central concept of “urban ministry” meant? 2) What are the main forms it has taken? and 3) What image, model, or paradigm of the city, inner city, or metropolitan area has informed the churches’ policy and strategy in cities?³

Green and his collaborators provide a sampling of the curricula history of urban theological education of which the East Harlem Protestant Parish, a widely acclaimed, innovative cooperative ministry in New York City, is the best-known example. His work is timely for an ecumenical conversation on urban theological education which incorporates both the academy and the community. He pushes the dominant paradigm of theological education by advocating a larger role for seminaries as partners in the social agenda and the needs of the urban context.

³ Clifford J. Green, ed. Churches, Cities, and Human Community: Urban Ministry in the United States 1945-1985 (Grand Rapids: Wms. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 2.

George Younger sharpens this focus in a similar way in his extensive research of the early efforts of the Action Training movement between 1961 and 1975. He suggested that:

Theological seminaries manifested a general inability and inertia in responding to the more complex society encountered in the city. As a result of this deficit, the decade of the 1960's saw the proliferation of a variety of training efforts. These efforts called action and urban training were developed by national Protestant mission boards and they were directed at enabling the churches to respond to the urban challenge.⁴

Further:

The decade of the 1960s saw the proliferation of a variety of training efforts developed by national mission boards. The first attempts at meeting what was defined as a need for clergy and staff training were: 1) in-service training programs set up by national staff members using inner-city clergy, national staff, and seminary and urban studies professors; 2) training in community organization, using the resources of Saul Alinsky and the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) or other community organization specialists; and 3) management training for mission executives either at university business schools or centers of urban studies, or developed by the faculty of those institutions.⁵

Younger documents the evolution of the Action Training Movement in response to the urban challenges of the 1960s. Community organizing framed from an action-reflection curricula perspective with the grassroots community is important for this research endeavor. The paradigm shift of the action training movement (or church-based urban training) was the emphasis on *contextual analysis* and the inclusion of *racial ethnic concerns* as integral to theological

⁴ George D. Younger, From New Creation to Urban Crisis: A History of Action Training Ministries 1962-1975 (Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1987), 3-5.

⁵ Ibid. , 4.

reflection on issues of mission and ministry. It attempted to establish a knowledge-base that furthered the exploration of systemic analysis and reflection as a form of instruction. Moreover, it provided opportunity for the grassroots and those victimized by the oppressive structures to have a voice in the educational process.

The proliferation of over 400 training organizations across the country assisted clergy, students, lay persons, and urban residents in bridging the gulf between their church and educational experiences, and the reality of life on the streets of the city. Such a curriculum fostered contextual relevance of teaching and learning that equipped persons to exegete their own cultural setting through social and historical analysis that interfaced with the biblical and theological reflection, and which allowed them to take responsibility for their lives. While urban realities of the 1990s differ from those 30 years ago, the legacy of the action training movement deserves revisiting. Hence, this curriculum grounded in a reflection and field research methodology addressed systemic and structural realities that perpetuated not only patterns of economic hardship, but political and social oppression of various forms.

During this same period under the passionate and charismatic leadership of Saul Alinsky, another urban ministry curriculum emerged in the form of church-based community organizing designed to empower communities to solve their own problems through direct political action.⁶ Alinsky, founder of the Industrial Area Foundation (IAF), is best known for his community organizing techniques in

⁶ Saul Alinsky, Reveille for Radicals (New York: Random House, 1946; 1969).

the Back Yards of Chicago in the 1940s. Community organization was perceived, then, as the means of forcing not only public officials but other established institutions to meet the needs of the community. He employed what has become known as the “golden rule” of community organizing that says, “You never do for people what they can do for themselves.”

The key distinction of Alinsky’s model was the use of confrontation and power as the pedagogical ingredient in every community transaction. Significantly, community organizing represented a paradigm shift from service to empowerment. Up to this point, writes Green, churches had been instrumental in the establishment of schools, hospitals, community centers, and other forms of social services.

Urban training and community organizing were the two most frequently used curricula during this era⁷. Green provides a sampling of others that contributed to the history of urban theological education:

- church planning: both of new congregation development and of strategic efforts to engage metropolitan structures and forces;
- creation of ecumenical metropolitan coalitions and church federations;
- creating special staff persons with names like minister of metropolitan mission and metropolitan mission coordinator;
- industrial area mission; and

⁷ Clifford Green, 21.

- ecumenical metropolitan experiments and projects such as Metropolitan Associates of Philadelphia to mobilize laity along vocational lines and the Los Angeles Regional Goals Projects to involve churches in city planning; creation of national ministries, centers, and committees as agencies for cooperation by
- denominations, such as the Joint Strategy and Action Committee, the Institute on the Church in Urban-Industrial Society, and the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility.⁸

The Presbyterian Church USA also contributed to this urban curricula history. "Within the Presbyterian Church, an urban ministry pedagogy can be traced from Calvin's Geneva, to early settlement of industrial cities of the north, through the post-war economy years, the civil rights period of the 1960s, the recession years of the 1970s, the "rust belt" years of the 1980s, to the most recent Welfare Reform legislation".⁹

George Todd dates the beginnings of postwar Presbyterian urban ministry with the creation of the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relation (PIIR) in 1944 under the visionary leadership of Marshall Scott. He was director of the Institute of Industrial Relations and Dean of McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago before becoming its president.¹⁰ The industrial revolution and its impact on labor relations was an essential focus of the curriculum for Scott. He was concerned

⁸ Ibid. , 21.

⁹ Warren L. Dennis, "In Service To An Urban Ministry Strategy," ed., Church and Society Presbyterian Church USA (November/December, 1995), 89.

¹⁰ George Todd, "Presbyterian Ministry in Urban America, 1945-80," Churches, Cities, and Human Community: Urban Ministry in the United States, 1945-1985, ed. , Clifford Green, 152.

more with the evolution of the industrial age with emphasis on management and labor relation than with the impending urbanization. Nevertheless, his contribution to urban theological education is significant. The curriculum Todd records:

gathered thirty to forty clergy several times a year for three weeks seminars that gave them exposure to industry. They learned from union leaders, managers, economists, public officials, and community organizers. Their biblical and theological reflection was laced with stiff doses of social and economic analysis that enabled them to explore the strengths and weaknesses of their church tradition while participating in working class situations. Seminary students spent ten weeks in factory jobs in the summers.¹¹

The early eighties brought forth the most recent model of urban theological education outside the formal structures of the academy. The Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE) based in Chicago under the leadership of David Frenchak, emerged out of the clear recognition for the programs of urban pastoral education. SCUPE was founded as an urban program for theological schools which bought into their program since they did not have an urban program of its own. It is an eleven month program during which students do 20 hours per week of supervised urban parish ministry and also take courses related to urban topics. It also provides lecture and workshop forums equipping both clergy and laity for their respective vocations in the urban-ministry arena.

¹¹ Ibid.

SCUPE is significant to this study because of its ecumenical approach. It brought thousands of clergy, lay and grassroots persons together biannually to network and share approaches to address urban issues. The SCUPE Congress on Urban Ministry has set the agenda for city ministry for the last 15 years.

Black Presbyterians also contributed to urban ministry curriculum development. One such contribution came in the founding of Black Presbyterian Caucus (BPC). “Gayraud Wilmore chronicled the evolution of BPC in 1893 with the founding of the Afro-Presbyterian Council at the First African Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia.”¹² He further states: “The Afro-American Council proved to be necessary not only for political reasons but also to provide a more regular opportunity for the fellowship and mutual edification that was hard to come by in the ‘integrated’ judicatories of the Northern Church, not to mention in the South, where a separate Black Presbyterian denomination was almost created.”¹³ Through this organization African American Presbyterians came together in solidarity to educate themselves about various issues attending to the African American struggle. United they forged their presence in the Presbyterian Church by developing curriculum and resources to equip persons for Christian ministry, and “to make all Presbyterians aware of the resources of the Black Christian tradition and the mission of the Presbyterian Church in the Black community—past, present, and future.”¹⁴ .

¹² Gayraud S. Wilmore, Black and Presbyterian: 69.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid. , 92.

Moreover, the past decade has produced a critical mass of scholarship on the value of Afrocentric thinking as an ideal and as a strategy for recovering the “core values”¹⁵ of African American communities. This writer is persuaded by the writings of Asante, Arkbar, Diop, Hilliard, Curruthers, Karenga, Van Sertima¹⁶, and others. Similarly, the literature on leadership by such persons as Bennis, Weems, Senegé, Schein, and McGregor Burns¹⁷ makes a valuable contribution to the purpose of this study. It frames theoretically the essential characteristics of leadership for urban ministry. When considered together as curriculum these two systematic views become a new leadership paradigm of urban theological education. This is key to the how persons in leadership position in the academy, church and the community view their role in urban settings.

Afrocentric Literary Review

The amount of literature debating Afrocentricity has proliferated in the past ten years. This debate has more recently entered into the mainstream of African American theological discourse. The study of the “Is This New Wine?” Paper

¹⁵ Mitchell and Cooper-Lewter, Soul Theology, Mitchell and Lewter upholds the belief system as “core value” of the African American community, and as the sustaining element that provides a sense of meaning and purpose to persons in times of crisis.

¹⁶ Molefi Kete Asante, Afrocentricity (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988); Jacob Carruthers, Essay in Ancient Egyptian Studies (Los Angeles: University of Sankofa Press, 1984), Cheikh Anta Diop, The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality (CT: Lawrence Hill, 1974), Na'im Arkbar, Chains and Images of Psychological Slavery (Jersey City: New Mind Production, 1984), Maulana Karenga, Introduction to Black Studies (Los Angeles: University of Sankofa Press, 1982), Ivan Van Sertima, They Came Before Columbus: The African Presence in the New World (New York: Random House, 1976).

¹⁷ Warren Bennis, Leadership: The Strategies For Taking Charge (New York: Harper Press, 1985); James MacGregor Burns, Leadership (New York: Harper Press, 1978); Peter M. Senegé, The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization (New York: DoubleDay/Currency Books, 1990a), Edgar H. Schein, Organizational Culture and Leadership: A Dynamic View (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985), Lovett H. Weems Jr., Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture and Integrity (Nashville: Abington Press, 1993).

represents the telescopic lens through which the nuance of Afrocentric writings is discussed. It is also the framework for discovering and examining the theoretical and practical implications of African American Presbyterians cultural history with regard to tenets of Afrocentrism.

It is the position of this research that the Afrocentric perspective not only challenges the legacy and current scholarship of western theology that has dominated since the seventeenth century, but it also provides a more practical self-defining analysis to the Black theological discourse. Ronald Peters, Professor of Urban Ministry at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary makes this cogent observation:

Afrocentricity, in the broadest sense, has come to refer to the practice of examining historical evidence as well as current reality utilizing pre-colonial black Africa rather than the beginnings of European expansionism and colonial activity as a point of reference. For years, Black theologians and Womanist theologians have been helpful in exposing the misuse of the Bible and the Christian Faith as tools in the oppression of African Americans throughout this nation's history. Afrocentrism, then, serves to assist the Christian community to understand the cultural and philosophical dynamic that was employed as a justification for the church's having been co-opted into the oppressive imperialism that defined European colonialism.¹⁸

Peter Paris moves the discussion forward among African American theologians by factoring source materials of Traditional African religion from a spiritual and ethical perspective to support his claim that more African culture was transmitted through the Diaspora than was formerly thought to be the case. His contribution is significant because it traces the religious and moral values

¹⁸ Ron Peters, "Afrocentrism and Mainline Denominations," (Unpublished Paper: Presented to the Conference on Church and Voluntary Organizations, Vanderbilt University Divinity School, 1994), 10.

embodied in the African experience. He demonstrated through comparative cultural analysis the underling value of culture as the foundation of Black ethical life.¹⁹ Paris viewed his chief task to be that of explicating the common features implicit in the traditional worldviews of African peoples as foundational for an African and African American moral philosophy.²⁰

Since the 1960s, Afrocentric theses and critiques have begun to be included in the curricula of the most prominent universities in this country,²¹ and more recently in some theological educational institutions. Cheryl Sanders of Howard University Divinity School in her collective essays of womanist theologians contrasted the emergence of Womanist Christian thought and Afrocentricity and their striking similarities. She sees them as two intersecting paradigms emerging out of an oppressed peoples' culture of resistance. "Womanist scholars", she writes, "have attested to the prevalence of Afrocentric ways of knowing and acting in African American women's quest for survival, wholeness, and liberation."²² Her essay, "Afrocentric and Womanist Approaches to Theological Education," attempts to identify some of the key methodological and epistemological issues involved in the employment of Afrocentric and womanist

¹⁹ Peter Paris, The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

²⁰ Ibid. , 19.

²¹ Tony Anderson, "Blowing Smoke: Exposing Empty Criticism of Afrocentricity," Molefi Kete Asante and Afrocentricity: In Praise and in Criticism, ed. , Dhyana Ziegler (Nashville: Winston Publishing Co. 1995), 119.

²² Cheryl J. Sanders, Living The Intersection: Womanism and Afrocentrism in Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 11.

pedagogies in theological education.²³ Further, she supports the core propositions made in this investigation when she writes: “Students who are preparing themselves for advanced scholarship or pastoral leadership can benefit greatly from being taught “how to” employ concrete experience as a criterion for meaning, and “how to” use dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, especially in their biblical, historical, and homilectical studies.”²⁴

In its most comprehensive form, “Afrocentricity” involves the notion that Africa and persons of African descent must be seen as proactive Subjects within human history and in the evolution of world civilization, rather than as passive objects mentioned as an aside to a more central human drama of Western history.²⁵ Asante asserts that [“Afrocentricity] regards Africa and its descendants as centers of anthropological value and critical partners in understanding the evolution of world civilization in a way that does not minimize the contributions of other people.”²⁶ He argues that when persons of African descent are able to perceive the world from an African-oriented center, a new awareness of consciousness of one’s own humanity is fully achieved.²⁷

Most writers on the subject would agree that Afrocentricity is a liberation and justice paradigm of the African past of African Americans from a European centered worldview. European history no longer frames the way African

²³ Ibid. , 17, 157.

²⁴ Ibid. , 165.

²⁵ Peters. 10.

²⁶ Molefe Kete Asante, The Afrocentric Idea (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 3.

²⁷ Ibid., 47-52.

Americans analyze social and religious life. From this perspective African American men and women become autonomous agents of change within current history.

Manu Ampim, in his controversial book Towards Black Community Development: Moving Beyond the Limitations of the Lecture Model, presses the discussion by providing a critical review of the current Afrocentric movement from an insider perspective that is essential for the pedagogy advocated in this study. This source is fundamental to the curricula concerns inherent in this ethnographic research. If Afrocentricity is to move to the next stage of development it must come to terms with those elements within its movement that are dysfunctional. Ampim argues, “that the Lecture Model as a Euro-American origin and orientation, is largely dysfunctional, and is actually a deterrent to African American community development.”²⁸ He puts forth an alternative method – the workshop community development model as the a process for empowering and transforming the African American community. “This model places emphasis on training, participation and interaction, follow-up, and practical application even in the most devastated areas in the community.”²⁹

This community development workshop model defines research and reflection, knowing and acting, faith and faithfulness as the way in which the African American community works together for its own liberation. Its main

²⁸ Manu Ampim, Towards Black Community Development: Moving Beyond The Limitations of The Lecture Model (Oakland, CA. Advancing The Research, 2nd. ed. , 1995), 25.

²⁹ Ibid. , 26.

focus is to bring together the best thinkers, scholars and activists in a workshop model to network in the best interest of the community. Under the workshop model says Ampim:

instead of having so many wasteful conferences, where the professional lecturers give repetitive speeches, there would be workshops: on networking, identifying resources, and improving the work effort within the six areas of the African Centered Consciousness Movement; on community organizing techniques; on organizing community centers, alternative schools, Black Studies programs and educational institutions; on the self-publishing of books, newspapers, magazines, and newsletters; on teaching training, research methodology, and the identification of historical interpretation; and on explaining the use of different oracle systems and meditation techniques.³⁰

Further:

The main focus of the Workshop Model is on training, skill capacity development, developing processes, programs, and institutions, and all leading toward self-reliance and independence. . . . The true workshop also train in the development of systems of analysis and synthesis, rather than simply giving information about the subject.³¹

Leadership Literary Review

Seminaries are pivotal in preparing persons to address the urban crisis in churches and communities, as such they must demonstrate the leadership necessary for a more preferred future. The literature on the topic of leadership is voluminous. According to (Bennis and Nanus) the depth of the literature indicates thousands of empirical studies and more than 350 definitions of

³⁰ Ibid. , 186.

³¹ Ibid. , 161.

leadership.³² They further state: “Leadership is the most studied and the least understood topic of any of the social sciences”.³³ In their study they interviewed 90 people identified as leaders. In a summation of their interviews, the authors describe a common thread:

They all have the ability to translate intention into reality and to sustain it. They all make a sharp distinction between leadership and management by concerning themselves with the organization’s basic purpose, why it exists, its general direction and value system. They are able to induce clarity regarding their organization’s vision.³⁴

The current literature abounds with this notion of “vision.” Once clearly communicated, the vision can give meaning and alignment to an organization and thus, enhance the ability of all members to make decisions and create change. Vision is like a phoenix arising from the collaboration of the people of God. In this instance, the leader becomes the servant of the vision that represents the vested interests of the people. Lovett Weems, president of St. Paul School of Theology, quoting a speech of Bishop Ruben P. Job, defines and describes vision this way:

Vision is a gift from God. It is the reward of discipline, faithful, and patient listening to God. Vision allows us to see beyond the invisible, beyond the barriers and obstacles to our mission. Vision ‘catches us up,’ captivates and compels us to act. Vision is the gift of eyes to faith, to see the invisible, to know the unknown, to think the unthinkable, to experience the not yet.³⁵

³² Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, Leader: The Strategies For Taking Charge (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1985), 4.

³³ Ibid. , 20.

³⁴ Ibid. , 226.

³⁵ Lovett H. Weems Jr. , Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture and Integrity (Nashville: Abington Press, 1993), 39.

Quoting John Navone, Weems further states:

Vision permeates our thoughts, desires, interests, ideals, imagination, feelings, and body language; it in our world view, our sense of life, our basic orientation toward reality. Our vision gives rise to our character, to our style of life, to our tone of being in the world. Vision is the way we grasp the complexity of life; it involves the meaning and value that we attach to the complexity of life as a whole and to the things of life in particular.³⁶

The vision of urban theological education as positioned in this research can only be actualized through the conviction and shared vision of church, seminary and grassroots community leadership. Living the vision of urban ministry on the part of the leaders in each of these social settings takes courage that may be unpopular but may ultimately lead persons to a new awareness of God's creative, transformative possibilities in the lives of the people. They must come together in a dialogical, empowering, collaborative, and transformative relationship that advocates change in the way teaching and learning occurs in communities. They must be committed to an action and reflection methodology, converting others into leaders and agents of change.

The most recent literature on leadership has emphasized the importance of collaboration as an organizing principle. It is one of three principles governing this research of urban theological education. It, however, requires greater exploration and research as a form of urban ministry. On the other hand, the usefulness of collaboration as a principle in this research provides a framework

³⁶ Ibid. , 41.

for a creative venture based upon shared knowledge and authority, rather than a hierarchical structure based on competition and division.

Collaboration magnifies the leadership mythology for a new paradigm emerging from the Is This New Wine? Paper that recognizes the potential of creative collective learning and action. It presumes the best contribution of urban ministry lies in the knowledge and expertise of the group as opposed to the heroic leader model of previous generations. Bennis resoundingly confirms this important principle in his book; Organizing Genius: The Secrets of Creative Collaboration. He writes about the characteristic of Great Groups of the 20th century:

Curiosity fuels every Great Group. The members don't simply solve problems. They are engaged in a process of discovery that is its own rewards. . . . They also have another quality that allows them both to identify significant problems and to find creative, boundary-busting solutions rather than simplistic ones. They have hungry, urgent minds. They want to get to the bottom of everything they see.³⁷

He further writes seemingly what is a paradox between Great Groups and leadership:

All Great Groups have extraordinary leaders, and, as a corollary, they tend to lose their way when they lose their leadership. . . . It's a paradox, really. Great Groups tend to be collegial and nonhierarchical, peopled by singularly competent individuals who often have an antiauthoritarian streak. Nonetheless, virtually every Great Group has a strong and visionary head.³⁸

This principle of collaboration is what differentiates urban theological education in the 21st century. The strength of seminaries' curricula as advocated

³⁷ Warren Bennis and Patricia Ward Biederman, Organizing Genius: The Secrets of Creative Collaboration (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1997), 17.

³⁸ Ibid. , 11.

in this research is the focus on coalition with existing public and private sectors formed in the community. Such a relationship values compassion, collaboration, and cultures at the congregational level as key to the transformation of communities. This suggests that effective urban ministry principled in collaboration empowers people to help themselves by working together on every level of community. It also suggests that leadership theories are key elements of any urban ministry curriculum.

How, then, does one attempt to describe leadership in the contemporary context of urban theological education? Today's urban environment may be described as rapidly changing, chaotic and unpredictable. In this context, the approaches to leadership growing out of conventional administration and management literature have proven inadequate. The managerial type leader has given way to the transformational type leader. This new leadership style tends to focus on learning as an essential element of vision for shaping the future of the church. They [the leader]work best by engaging others in a learning and discovery process of molding their vision. Above all, they seek to relate their vision to the core values and beliefs of the church and community. Thus, the person who focuses exclusively on a managerial style runs the risk of over-controlling the church, narrowing its field of vision, losing track of long term goals, and not seeing the need for change due to shifting environmental contexts.

Weems offers this definition for our consideration: "Leadership is the development and articulation of a shared vision, motivation of those key people

without whom that vision cannot become a reality, and gaining the cooperation of most of the people involved.”³⁹ “Leadership . . . depends upon the vigorous and responsible use of the talents God has given to each individual.”⁴⁰ Therefore, they must be developed. When a congregation and its leadership are aware and are actively living out their responsibilities to detect, nurture, and develop the gifts that God has provided, they become powerful witnesses to the spirit of God in their midst and in the world. Every church leader should, according to Weems, ask themselves this crucial question: “What is it for which the church looks to me which, if I do not do it, no one else can or will?”⁴¹

The nature of church leadership is “missional, not institutional”, states Kennon Callahan.⁴² What this means for Callahan is that the day of the professional minister as manager working primarily on the inside of the church has given way to the missionary pastor. He describes the professional minister’s model as the period of a *church culture*. A missionary pastor is one who has a keen sense of the community’s struggle for justice and liberation. This person understands the underlining discipline of urban ministry *with* the community instead of *to* or *for* the community. As a result of this paradigm shift from *inside* the church to *outside*, the urban centers have become the new mission field.

³⁹ Weems, , 34

⁴⁰ Ibid. , 17.

⁴¹ Ibid. , 27.

⁴² Kennon L. Callahan, Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1990), 257.

Callahan describes a managerial leadership phenomena which was prevalent throughout the 1940s and 50s. Church leadership, then, placed emphasis on nurturing and building the community within the church. The church focused on programs and activities which help the congregants to nurture their Christian faith, while little or no attention was given to the community outside of the church. Evidence of the professional model can still be seen in theological curricula today. Hence, this same argument of leadership and mission applies to theological education in an urban context. The curricula of theological education must seek to be missional beyond the traditional classroom environment.

Effective leadership, then, is helping persons to hear the utterance of their community and articulate the meaning of those utterance in a vision. The leader hears the uttering voices, discerns the vision, articulates the promise, tests the response, and refines the vision. He or she looks for clues within the dynamics of the congregation or group; that is, hearing that which has not been heard before and giving it meaning. It is as if one is being asked to see what cannot be seen and hear what is not being said. The leader, then, is called upon to interpret the people's response and shape their response into action. It is a task of formulating the voices of the people into a vision of the future that is simple, easily understood, clearly desirable and energizing.

Forrest Harris in his book Ministry for Social Crisis provides yet another dimension of leadership from an African American perspective. He uses four models to analyze the leadership of styles of Black church leaders: pastoral

model, prophetic model, reformist model, and nationalistic model. He defines Black religious leadership as “the effective exercise of one’s ability to communicate the values of the Black Christian tradition, and one’s ability to act to mobilize people and resources toward the accomplishment of specific social ministry and liberation goals.”⁴³ To fulfill the role of leader in the Black church’s social ministry, the Black pastor must have moral commitment, community vision, social consciousness, and theological understanding of the Black church tradition.

In review of the literature on the qualities of effective church leaders, this writer, as one might suspect, could find no one single characteristic. Hence, while effective leaders do have certain competencies, they also have a personal style. Barbara A. Sapienza researching the leader role behavior as perceived by school administrators underscores the point of individual styles :

In concert with an individual’s style, there are additional factors that need to be considered in a discussion of effective skills/abilities. The qualities, characteristics, and skills required in a leader are determined to a large extent by the demands of the situation in which he/she is to function. It is the understanding of the whole, as the sum of the parts, that is necessary for effective leadership.⁴⁴

In other words, today’s church leaders must be system thinkers proficient in seeing the larger picture in terms of people’s experiences as the medium for understanding matters of faith and faithfulness, “rather than relying on abstract

⁴³ Forrest Harris, Ministry for Social Crisis (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1993), 78.

⁴⁴ Barbara A. Sapienza, “Leader Role Behavior As Perceived By Principals, Business Educators Supervisors and Business Teachers.” (Ed. D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1990), 61.

ideas brought from the Greek philosophical tradition, or official church structures and offices borrowed from Rome's imperial government"⁴⁵. They must be able to foster a learning environment "that is comprehensive, requiring thinking that is organic rather than mechanistic."⁴⁶ These concepts of system thinking and an organic learning environment represents a shift in the leadership literature. Together they focus the need to understanding the deeper meaning of core theological values in the African American community in terms of faith, resistance and action.

Thomas Hawkins in his book, The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership presents a four stage model of learning from Holland's and Henriots 1983, Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice. The stages include: 1) insertion, 2) analysis, 3) theological reflection, and 4) pastoral planning.⁴⁷ In these steps individuals look at what is happening, why it is happening, what problems it causes and what they can do about them. Learning begins with individual commitment and openness to learn, but must move beyond the individual to the congregation and then to the community.

Learning congregations, says Hawkins:

find multiple ways for their members to name the world in terms of the gospel—to link action and reflection, faith and faithfulness, thinking and doing. This happens in every committee meeting, every governing board session, every task force assigned to solve a problem. . . . Learners and facilitators are involved in a continual process of activity, reflection upon activity,

⁴⁵ Thomas R. Hawkins, The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997), 40.

⁴⁶ Ibid. , 40.

⁴⁷ Ibid. , 36.

collaborative analysis of activity, new activity, further reflection and collaboration analysis and so on.⁴⁸

The idea of organic and comprehensive leadership underscores the third principle of urban theological education that is transformative. When leaders engage people in a learning modality transformation takes place in their reflection and inquiry and their interaction in the community. Learning, therefore, is transformative. Relying upon the work of Sara Little, Hawkins elaborates:

Church leaders facilitate knowing-in-action when they train people in practical theological reflection. This emphasis would mean that we learn not only to improve what we do, but equally important that we be increasingly able to construct or formulate a body of knowledge that contributes to our theological frame of reference, undergirding all we do.⁴⁹

The academy, church, and community represents a new learning center for urban theological education that is vested in an urban context. Together, they are forging, a collaborative, transformative, and prophetic leadership and curriculum paradigm that changes how we think and prepare students, pastors, church members, and community persons for ministry in cities. The organic nature of such an approach allows for continual creativity and growth with the focus on people rather than on structures.

A summary of the characteristics of leadership are as followed:

1. Leaders are mission-minded.
2. Leaders possess a “can do” attitude.

⁴⁸ Ibid. , 41.

⁴⁹ Ibid. , 42 citing Sara Little, Rethinking adult education. Rethinking Christian Education: Explorations in Theory and Practice, ed., David S. Schuller (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993).

3. Leaders see the big picture not yet actualized.
4. Leaders break the rules.
5. Leaders are risk-takers.
6. Leaders think inside-out.
7. Leaders master the context.
8. Leaders define reality.
9. Leaders establishes an appropriate shared vision.
10. Leaders are visionaries.
11. Leaders anticipate the future based on the past and present.
12. Leaders have an intuitive sense of where the organization is going.
13. Leaders know themselves.
14. Leaders thrive on learning.
15. Leaders invent themselves.

Finally, the academy and the church play a crucial role in equipping people for practical theological reflection. They do so by helping persons to interpret the meaning of experience by engaging them in a process of framing and reframing experiences in terms of the gospel and exploring responses to experiences in ways that express Christian identity.

Therefore, responsible leadership at each level of this study of urban theological education is crucial. By infusing Afrocentrism and leadership theories furthers the notion of appropriate leadership for urban theological education. Warren Bennis promotes the concept of personal power that says “self-invention

is self-imagination.” If an individual is unable to reinvent, or imagine themselves in a new way, that person is more than likely destined to “be content with borrowed postures, second hand ideas . . . and will find themselves fitting in instead of standing out.”⁵⁰ Bennis elaborates on this belief saying: “The self is all the leader has to work with in the true sense of the term.”⁵¹ In other words, the “self” becomes an instrument of change. Lovett Weems provides further elaboration on this sketch of the characteristics of the leader’s journey:

Leadership includes a life-long journey filled with continuing growth. Leaders are people with a capacity to grow, who thrive on challenge and new experiences, and who are excited about the possibilities of new learning and change. . . . It is an art to be cultivated and developed. . . . It can never be understood apart from mission and vision.⁵²

Leadership, as it pertains to this study, is viewed as a teaching and learning process that is nurtured by the discerning capacity of the African American community. The ultimate purpose of the community leaders is to shape a moral productive environment that nurtures a person’s competence to articulate the vision and mission of the community. The leader’s role defined in this way is based on the perceived expectations of the people in the community. Thus, a responsible leader is one who listens, organizes, motivates, educates, provides

⁵⁰ Warren Bennis, *An Invented Life* (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1993), 31.

⁵¹ Warren Bennis, *On Becoming A Leader* (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1989), 120.

⁵² Lovett H. Weems, Jr. , 25.

technical assistance and empowers people to think and act on their behalf. A crucial question to ask is: How does what we do strengthen the group?

Thus, the paradigm of Afrocentric leadership as vision and mission is the basis of this writer's understanding of urban theological education. More importantly, the writer is convinced that Afrocentricity is a strategy for African American communities to reclaim the values and norms destroyed through desegregation, urban renewal, consumerism, assimilation, integration, and the systemic distortion and omission by Western society of African, and African American contributions to world civilization. The notion of a paradigm shift in research that frames ethnography and leadership theories in urban theological education is key to an understanding of the contributions of the academy, church, and grassroots community in the discernment of a proper theological construct for community revitalization.

This literature suggests that theological educators change their entire outlook, orientation and approaches to dealing with matters of curricula in urban theological education. The essence of this new focus urges the academy, and the church to become interactive in approaching curricula development. This includes administration, long-range planning, and collaborative decision making that involves the grassroots and other community organizations. The curriculum should reflect the religious heritage and core values of the community.

Finally, the emerging literature of urban ministry as a field of study within theological education raises all sort of possibilities in terms of curriculum

development leading to transformation of the African American community. If transformation is to occur in urban churches and communities, this writer contends that it must start with seminaries' curricula.

CHAPTER III

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Historical Foundation

"He who forgets the aim of his journey is still on the road."

African Proverb

The African American Presbyterian Church and its roots of faith and resistance in the slavery genre is important material for a urban theological education framework. As African American Presbyterians near the end of the twentieth century and after 193 years in the Presbyterian Church there are profound truths that need to be appropriated for what it means to be of African ancestry in a denomination that remains permanently entrenched in a Graeco-Roman theological view of biblical history, and ethnicity. The first step in obtaining these truths, therefore, is to lay the historical and theological foundation for a common discourse that is self-critical among persons of African descent in the Presbyterian Church USA, to recognize the high degree of Christian and African syncretism that exist both on the continent and in the Diaspora, and its implications for urban theological education and the empowerment of African American communities.

The European invasion and the cataclysmic event of kidnapping Africans from central and western parts of Africa, the conspiratorial role of Africans in the kidnapping, the holocaust of the Middle Passage and the enslavement of an estimated sixty million Africans over a period of four centuries represent the

beginning of many crises to be faced by Africans transplanted in North America. Nevertheless, in the African American community there is evidence of traditional African core spiritual beliefs and values, after more than four hundred years of systematic distortion and dismantling of African culture, though according to Marsha Haney, most of the outer forms and materials of the culture were lost.¹

The emergence of African American culture can be traced to the genesis of African American spirituality, say Stewart, which had a significant role in developing and sustaining its creative and innovative elements”² Numerous scholars, including Raboteau, Herskovits, Mitchell, Hilliard, DuBois, Lincoln, Mitchell, Paris, and Wilmore confirm the retention of these cultural traits as a basic strategy of survival for coping with the enslavement reality. They contend that African survival traits are present in the Black church and community today. Henry Mitchell is convinced that it is impossible to destroy all of the African culture of the slave past.³ Raboteau noted that this particular insight refutes the notion of African cultural retention: “The retention of an African world view, thought, customs and beliefs among those brought to North America were transmitted by enslaved Africans to their descendants.”⁴

Wilmore echoes this point:

Scholars are now more confident than ever before that the first slaves to become Christians, and many who followed them, held on to certain features of their old African beliefs. In Africa

¹ Marsha Snulligan Haney, Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Islam and The Protestant African American Churches (Unpublished Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1994), 74.

² Stewart, Soul Survivors: An African American Spirituality, 71

³ Mitchell, Soul Theology, 22.

⁴ Albert Raboteau, A Fire In The Bones (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995) 4.

they had already recognized the existence of a supreme or high God. They had adopted baptism and believed in the power of prayer. . . . And where they adopted new ideas and practices that were similar to the old ones, the African forms were strengthened rather than weakened.⁵

Tracing the debate of African religion on the development of African-American Christianity, says, James Evans, is a highly complex and controversial venture. He writes:

The conflicting positions of Melville Herskovites and E. Franklin Frazier have for decades framed the debate around African retention upon the black population of the United States. Herskovites argued that Africans maintained many of their traditions, customs, and beliefs in spite of the ravages of slavery. E. Franklin Frazier, on the other hand, believed that the experiences of the Middle Passage, the brutality of slavery, and the irresistible influence of European-American culture prohibited the retention of the essential elements of indigenous African culture.⁶

Cornel West who further describes these cultural attributes in the Du Boisian sense as Black “strivings” writes:

The specificity of black culture- namely, those features that distinguish black culture from other cultures, lies in both the *African* and *American* character of black people’s attempts to sustain their mental sanity and spiritual health, social life and political struggle in the midst of a slave holding, white supremacist civilization that viewed itself as the most enlightened, free, tolerant, and democratic experiment in human history.⁷

⁵ Gayraud S. Wilmore, Black and Presbyterian , 41.

⁶ James Evans Jr., We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 56.

⁷ Henry Louis Gates and Cornel West, The Future of The Race (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 79.

What these vestiges of African religious characteristics, beliefs, and survival techniques mean are that the primary expressions of Africa are still alive despite every attempt to destroy them. "That Black people," says Stewart, "still exist in America is an expression of unyielding faith in a power greater than life"⁸. It means, moreover, that the hope for the African American community in terms of the crisis of faith and resistance lies in reclaiming these beliefs and values as pedagogy of the community.

Dwight Hopkins, in his effort to construct a Black Theology from indigenous sources, states: "They [enslaved Africans] combined aspects of African traditional religion with the liberation message in the Bible and simply refused to accept white theology."⁹ The indigenous nature of these beliefs depends on the retention of those Africanisms, ideas, and presuppositions which were unequivocally oppositional to White Christian interpretation.¹⁰ We see further evidence of this in song, dance, oration styles, stories, proverbs, worship celebrations, prayers, music, funeral services, and others. Hence, there is a cultural and spiritual resource rich in benefits for all African American Christians. Such a resource would have sustaining power for a community experiencing crisis in every form of its existence. Melva Costen is helpful on this point in her examination of the theology of African American worship rooted in African religious heritage.

⁸ Caryle Fielding Stewart, III, Soul Survivors: An African American Spirituality, 51.

⁹ Dwight N. Hopkins, Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources For A Constructive Black Theology (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 23.

¹⁰ Carlye Fielding Stewart III, Street Corner Theology: Indigenous Reflection on the Reality of God in the African American Experience (Nashville: James C. Winston Publishing, 1996), 7.

She writes:

Some of the ritual practices of Western-oriented theologies may in fact, be based on certain African practices that have been transmitted through oral tradition. This is one indication that many core beliefs remain operative across denominational lines.¹¹

Retaining African heritage has always been important to African Americans from the time of enslavement to the present. The task of this research is to discover the core of these same expressions in the Black community today; and to discern how African Americans give articulation to the liberating acts of God.

Black Presbyterian Historical Overview

The Presbyterian history among African Americans is laced with conflict, contradictions and ambiguity. From the question of slavery first raised among white Presbyterians in the Synod of New York and Philadelphia in 1774¹² until the present, the Presbyterian Church has been ambivalent about its relationship with African Americans.

Professor Darius Swann describes this ambiguity in the introduction of The History and Contributions of All-Black Governing Bodies: A Report of the Presbyterian Church USA:

The ambiguities in the Churches' action relating to Black issues have colored the feelings of African American Presbyterians about their church. This is explicitly true in the conflict concerning slavery, the rights of Black people, and the racism that continues to be a dilemma for people of the United States, including Presbyterians. How could these churches accept the practice of the United States of declaring life, liberty, and the

¹¹ Melva Costen, African American Christian Worship (Nashville: Abington Press, 1993), 16.

¹² Andrew E. Murray, Presbyterians and the Negro-A History (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966), 16.

pursuit of happiness to be divinely endowed rights, while holding in chattel slavery thousands upon thousands of Black men and women?¹³

Gayraud Wilmore describes further this ambivalence with the example of the hesitation of Presbytery of Transylvania on the issue of slavery in 1797:

The question was put to the presbytery: "Is slavery a moral evil?" The vote gave the answer as "Yes." A second question was put: "Are all persons who hold slaves guilty of a moral evil?" The answer given was "no." When a third question attempted to get the presbytery to decide, if not all slave holders, which of them should be considered guilty of a moral evil, the answer was: "resolved that the question...be put off until a future day."¹⁴

Since the establishment of the first Presbyterian Church in North America at South-old, Long Island in 1640 until the first General Assembly in 1789 there was, undoubtedly, a fellowship of Blacks under a variety of conditions trafficking in and out of the Presbyterian Church.¹⁵ The Synod of New York and New Jersey established the African School (1816-1825) as an effort to secure educated leaders for increasing Black presence. Before the African School, most Black Presbyterian clergy during this period were trained under the private tutelage of a white clergy. "Until the Tuscaloosa Institute [Stillman Institute] for training Black ministers was established in 1876, the best the church offered was for a Black aspirant to be placed under a White minister's care to learn from him

¹³ Swann, Darius L., All-Black Governing Bodies: The History and Contributions of All-Black Governing Bodies. A Report of the Presbyterian Church USA. Approved by the 205th General Assembly (1993) Published by The Office of the General Assembly, Louisville, Kentucky, 1996, 1.

¹⁴ Wilmore, Black and Presbyterian., 62-63.

¹⁵ Frank T. Wilson, "A Continuing Pilgrimage," Periscope~2: Black Presbyterianism-Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. 175 Years of Ministry-1807-1982 (Publishing date not recorded)

as much as he could.”¹⁶ One of the earliest Black leaders to emerge with recognition was John Chavis (1763-1838), a Presbyterian missionary and educator, who when barred from preaching by the General Assembly organized schools in the south and taught both whites and Blacks.

Wilmore researching the work of the Rev. W. H. Franklin, a Black Presbyterian educator who wrote: “The Early History of the Presbyterian Church in the USA among the Negroes,” in Presbyterian Historical Society, discovered that Blacks were introduced to Presbyterianism in the homes of pious white Presbyterians.¹⁷ On the issue of slavery Wilmore noted “that it took over two hundred years from the days of John Calvin and John Knox for Presbyterians to take up the matter of African slavery.”¹⁸ Presbyterians in fact held slaves without any recorded church law or policy prohibiting otherwise.

The origin of Black Presbyterianism is primarily urban. The Evangelical Society of Philadelphia under grided by the ethical revivalism of the Second Great Awakening in 1807 introduced Blacks to the Presbyterian Church. Although the initial Presbyterian outreach to Blacks came in the south, through the efforts of Samuel Davis, a white Presbyterian evangelist, the first organized efforts to form Black Presbyterian congregations took place in the urban north in Philadelphia with the organization of First African Presbyterian Church. John Gloucester (1771-1822) born a slave in Tennessee was the new church development pastor.

¹⁶ Swann, 53.

¹⁷ Wilmore, Black and Presbyterian, 60.

¹⁸ Ibid., 57.

First African was organized thirty years after the American Revolution and twenty years after Richard Allen founded The African Methodist Episcopal Church, which sparked a protest that produced several independent Black denominations, i.e., The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the Baptist churches and many others. The formation of these churches articulate both a need to separate and a need to identify more acutely with the God of their true African selves. These churches committed themselves to moral reform, socio-political change, and mission activity. Among those religious leaders who along with Allen courageously nurtured the vision of freedom and independence from white racism were Absalon Jones, James Varick, Nathaniel Paul, David Walker, Gabriel Prosser, Demark Vessey, Nat Turner, W.C. Pennington, Henry Highland Garnet, Samuel Cornish, Theodore Wright, and Edward Blyden.

With the emancipation of great numbers of African American independent denominations, Swann makes this observation about freed Black Presbyterians:

It is clear, however, that a considerable number of freed persons who had been exposed to the Presbyterian program and tradition preferred to continue in it, but most southern Presbyterians were unable to make the attitudinal adjustment to accommodate them. . . . In the face of mass exodus away from the white churches, the Southern Presbyterian Church tried officially to retain its Negro members within its own fold, segregated in the balconies, as they had been during the days of slavery, made inadequate concessions in the face of mounting desertion, and finally determined on the establishment of an independent Negro church after the hope of building one was gone.¹⁹

¹⁹ Swann, 53.

The mortifying experience of African people in the New World, the evangelical revival movement, the independent Black church movement, abolitionist propaganda, emergence of Black nationalism and mid- nineteenth century African American religious thought may be regarded as important watersheds in the rise of Afrocentrism. These early African American religious leaders framed the leadership paradigm that is the hallmark of this exploration. Two such Black Presbyterian leaders deserve mentioning as examples for our consideration.

Early Afrocentric Presbyterian Leadership

African American Presbyterians have paid a great price for integration and have allowed their historical heroes and heroines to be marginalized, distorted and omitted from mainstream curricula. Throughout the history of the Black presence in the Presbyterian Church, however, there have been courageous voices of protest and resistance to the inhumane treatment of African Americans. These Eighteenth century Black leader's eschatological view was geared toward the total abolition of slavery and the complete emancipation of Black life. Two figures who deserve preeminent recognition in Black Presbyterian history for their theological critique of racial injustice are: Henry Highland Garnet and Edward Wilmont Blyden. These two men represent the early beginnings of Afrocentric thought in Black Presbyterian history. Not only do they represent the best of our intellectual heritage, but they laid the foundation for future leaders to base their protest.

Henry Highland Garnet

Henry Highland Garnet (1815-1882) “of royal lineage, the son of an African chief from the Mandingo tribe,”²⁰ is perhaps the earliest African American nonconformist in Presbyterian history. Garnet, a Presbyterian minister, preached that it was a matter of Christian obligation to revolt. He, along with Richard Allen, David Walker and Nat Turner, are seen as forerunners of Black unity and the Black liberation struggle. David Walker²¹ greatly influenced Garnet with his polemical work.

Garnet’s speech on “resistance and freedom” for, example, made to the Buffalo Convention of Colored Citizen in 1843 is a hallmark of speeches that shocked even the liberal middle-class abolitionists. He urged outright rebellion against the evils of slavery. According to Henry Young “the address was indeed Garnet’s most significant, and it has had a great impact on the development of Black religion, the Black church, and American history. He aptly described it as a “theology of resistance” intended to advance the abolitionist movement to a new form. An address to be sent to enslaved Africans, it was perhaps the most powerful attack on the institution of slavery since the Walker Appeal in 1827:²²

If... a band of Christians should attempt to enslave a race of heathen men, and to entail slavery upon them and to keep them in heathenism in the midst of Christianity, the God of heaven would smile upon every effort which the injured might make to disenthral themselves. Brethren, it is wrong for your lordly

²⁰ Henry Young, Major Black Religious Leaders: 1755-1940 (Nashville: Abington, 1977), 85.

²¹ David Walker’s Appeal: To the Colored Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of The United States of American, (Published privately by the author in 1829) See revised edition with an introduction by Sean Wilentz (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965).

²² Ibid. , 90.

oppressor to keep you in slavery as it was for the man-thief to steal our ancestors from the coast of Africa. You should therefore now use the same manner of resistance as would have been just in our ancestors when the bloody foot-print of the first remorseless soul thief were placed upon the shores of our fatherland. The humblest peasant is as free in the sight of God as the proudest monarch that ever swayed a skeptic. Liberty is a spirit sent from God and, like its great Author, is no respecter of persons. Brethren, the time has come when you must act for yourselves. It is an old and true saying that, "if hereditary bondsmen would be free, they must themselves strike the blow."²³ Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberties. Now is the day and the hour Let every slave throughout the land do this and the days of slavery are numbered. Rather die freemen than live to be slaves. . . . Awake, Awake, millions of voices are calling you! Let your motto be resistance; no oppressed people have secured their liberty without resistance.²⁴

Young summing up Garnet's address theologically further stated:

That Garnet's combination or synthesization of spiritual liberation and physical liberation challenged the slaves to resist slavery and to use moral, intellectual, and physical means to eradicate slavery and oppression. He contended that God was in favor of this and that the oppressed had a mandate from God to resist the oppressors. . . . He felt one cannot be a Christian and a slave at the same time. One cannot worship God in slavery.²⁵

Edward Wilmont Blyden

Edward Wilmont Blyden(1832-1912), clearly an exceptional intellectual of his time, who served as a missionary, as well as a British ambassador to Liberia deserves much esteem for being in the vanguard of Pan-African theology. He possessed a keen inquiry into the African world as he sought to reconnect African people to their origins and history. Snulligan writes, "he influenced African

²³ James H. Cone, Black Theology and Black Power (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 96.

²⁴ John Hope Franklin, From Slavery To Freedom, Third Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publishing, 1967), 253. Franklin also explains the middle-class attractiveness the Abolitionists had for the Black Leadership even during this period.

²⁵ Henry Young, 97.

American Christians through his writings and speeches during the years of 1860 throughout the 1890's, more perhaps than any other missionary sent from the United States."²⁶

Further:

Blyden's theology eventually lead to a universal deism, and he became instrumental in the development of a reform movement in Liberia. However, before he broke ties with the missionary efforts of the church, his missional theory of cultural relativism based on respect for the indigenous culture, and the practice of urging missionaries to learn the native language as soon as possible and to bond with the people, creating a following of individuals who were greatly influenced by him.²⁷

Born in the Caribbean island of St. Thomas in the West Indies of a free Negro family, educated by Presbyterians, Blyden was perhaps one of the most brilliant scholars, theologians, and Africanist during the 1860's and 1880's.²⁸ He became an ordained Presbyterian clergy in 1858. Raboteau notes:

When race relations reached a new low in the 1880's and 1890's, several black leaders turned to Africa as the Promised Land. Proponents of emigration, such as Alexander Crummell and Edward Wilmont Blyden, urged African Americans to abandon the American wilderness for an African Zion.²⁹

Researching the account and life of Blyden, Moses N. Moore, Jr. writes that in 1886 after almost thirty years as an ordained Presbyterian minister, missionary, and educator in Liberia, he informed fellow members of the Presbytery of West

²⁶ Marsha Snulligan, Haney, Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Islam and The Protestant African American Churches, 143.

²⁷ Ibid. , 144.

²⁸ St. Clair Drake, Redemption of Africa and Black Religion (Chicago: Third World Press, 1991), 54.

²⁹ Raboteau, 35.

Africa that he wished to demit his ordination in order to become a “Minister of Truth.”³⁰ “Most assessments of Blyden’s transition focus on his increasing appreciation of Islam and his perception of its positive influences on West African indigenous cultures and people in contrast to that of traditional missionary Christianity.”³¹

A strong advocate of pride in the African self, Blyden receives credit for the term the “African personality.” “The idea of African personality, African spirituality and African salvation of the world are prevalent in Blyden’s thought.”³² George Thomas writes:

He kept before African Americans the self image of that larger identity that linked blacks in America with Africa, the ancestral home. He provided for Africans the larger identity of peoplehood.³³

Asante writes that “Blyden attempted in a major way to address the fundamental issues of Africans in contact with Europeans and Arabs. In effect, he wanted to demonstrate that the African, despite European propaganda was not inferior to Europeans but was the progenitor of human civilization.”³⁴

³⁰ Moses N. Moore, Jr., Edward Wilmont Blyden: From Old School Presbyterian Missionary to “Minister of Truth”. *Journal of Presbyterian History* 75: 2 (Summer, 1997), 103.

³¹ Ibid., 108.

³² Molefi Kete Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990), 112.

³³ George B. Thomas, aka Ndugu G.B. T’Ofori-Atta “African Religion: A New Focus for Black Theology”, Calvin E. Bruce and William Jones, ed. *Black Theology II: Essays on the Formation and Outreach of Contemporary Black Theology* (London: Associated University), 107.

³⁴ Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*, 112.

Drawing from the work of Howard Brotz' The African Problem and the Method of Solution, Young describes the theology of Blyden from a Providential and Pan-African view point:

It was Blyden's contention that slavery of any kind was an outrage, because "it spoils the image of God as it strives to express itself through the individual or the race. He believed that God dwells within man and [woman], therefore making man [woman] a part of God. . . . Each person and each race should have the opportunity to be free and to maximize the divinity within. . . . He began with the scriptural passage Deuteronomy 1:21, "Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possessed it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged."³⁵

Commenting on Blyden's nationalistic stand, Young further writes:

Blyden felt that Black Americans would never receive the respect and honor of others until they established a strong, powerful nationalism. He argued that Black Americans should return to Africa states, establish and maintain institutions, make and administer laws, erect and preserve churches, develop governments, teach in schools, control the mass media and the economy.³⁶

He related such a proposal to Israel's departure from four hundred years of exile in Egypt, during which they took with them their trades, treasures, arts, intelligence, and skills to be used to build a new nation. Blyden's new nation would have its' beginning in Liberia.

As it can be seen from the above, a preeminent African world view existed among early Nineteenth century African American scholars and leaders. Both Henry Highland Garnet and Edward Wilmont Blyden represent the best of African

³⁵ Henry Young, 130.

³⁶ Ibid. , 132.

American Presbyterian leadership and cultural intellectualism. They could not keep silent in the face of systemic injustice. They believed with strong convictions that God endowed their resistance to the hypocrisy of slavery. The challenge that came from these two nineteenth century Black theologians gave rise to a new theological thinking and awareness in which Black Americans and Black Africans sought to integrate their Christian faith into African categories.

Astute as they were, these men are also the ancestral spirits guiding African Americans from a theology of “resistance” to a theology of “development”, emerging into an Afrocentric pedagogy that embraces a synthesization of Black theology and African theology. Their interest in advocating an African worldview is motivated by a desire to counter the lies and distorted images that European scholars and religious leaders were producing at the time in the defense of slavery and oppression. Their theological positions serve as illustration and guidance for proponents of the “Is This New Wine?” Paper.

Garnet’s voice is Afrocentric because of his non-negotiable call for “resistance” to oppression of any kind. He was willing to risk life in his emancipatory call to strike for liberty and justice. Blyden’s voice is Afrocentric because of his intellectual prowess and his critical analyses of African peoples as Subject rather than object. He laid the foundation for future Pan-Africanist and Afrocentrists. His political and cultural ideas greatly influenced the Nineteenth century African and African American religious leadership. Each of them constructed a pedagogical paradigm of African American self determination and

education that reflect the core values embedded in the African American culture today. They developed their prophetic calling in part by the need to challenge the racism within their own denomination.

From this historical overview a clear paradigm of theological education can be discerned that is African- centered and biblically grounded. There is a plethora of illustrations and images in African American Presbyterian history that are more congruent to African Americans as models of Christian leadership. It is crucial for African Americans Presbyterians to link the distinguishing facts of African and African American history and heritage to theological education from an African American perspective. More research is needed on African American Presbyterian personalities as a distinguishing mark of theological education flowing into a deep respect and appreciation of the African American struggle. “The problem “Wilmore opined: “is that most African American Presbyterians churches have never been introduced to the thinking of Black theologians and scholars in religion”.³⁷

³⁷ Gayraud S. Wilmore, 209th General Assembly Presbyterian Church USA (Minutes, 1997).

CHAPTER IV

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF "IS THIS NEW WINE?"

*"Whenever the spirit appears, the oppressed gather fresh courage;
for He announced the good news that fear, hypocrisy, and hatred,
the three hounds of hell that track the trail of the disinherited, need have no
dominion over them."*¹

Howard Thurman

Toward a Theology of the Grassroots

The African American Presbyterian church now more than before has the responsibility to take the sanctuary to the streets. The Is This New Wine Paper advocates for a theology of the 'grassroots' that reflects the liberating aspirations of indigenous persons who because of their crisis circumstances seek to discern God's self-disclosure and God's self-revelation in the theater of their lives. This theology comes from among the liberating spirit of the people living in oppressed inner-city neighborhoods finding authentication in context.

The Is This New Wine Paper speaks of an urban grassroots gospel of the Kingdom of God as central to both thought and action. This theology of the grassroots starts with pedagogical dialogue and systemic analysis of the neighborhood between persons in the academy, the church, and the community. It is liberation theology in its optimal form taking seriously the Black religious experience in urban America and creating a norm where people come first, not dogma. It values people's experiences

¹ Howard Thurman, Jesus and the Disinherited (Richmond, Ind.: Friends United Press, 1981), 29.

in-ministry as equally important in the educational process as they reflect upon their engagement as practical theology.

It acknowledges the voice of those who are victimized by the structures and power of government, and at the same time recognizes the voices of those who legislate public policies without valuing the input of the oppressed. It is the process of educating people to see for themselves the false reality prescribed by their oppressors. It raises the question: How do those who are systematically oppressed give expression to the presence of God in their liberation?

Carlyle Fielding Stewart III in his book Street Corner Theology: Indigenous Reflections on the Reality of God in the African American Experience states:

The point here is to give voice to these unique people, all of whom have extraordinary stories to tell and have a philosophical and theological grounding that transcends their social condition. Their stories are theological inasmuch as they describe legitimate, real-life interpretations of God. These understandings of God are cogent, coherent, and tenable and could easily be placed alongside more formal theological discourse. . . . Street corner theology is thus rooted in a culture of hope and filled with the positive expectations of the possibilities of God.²

Further:

Indigenous black theology is concerned with the eradication of those political, material, social, personal, relational, and spiritual impediments preventing the full realization of human wholeness, the actualization of personal empowerment, the spiritual and relational transformation of African American communities. It is concerned with the identification, exploration, and development of black spirituality and theology unique to indigenous African Americans.³

² Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, Street Corner Theology., 2.

³ Ibid. , 9.

It is important that grassroots urban African American persons reclaim their cultural, historical, and spiritual heritage as an appropriate framework for providing the theological background from which to develop a sound theological response to the systemic marginalization and oppression faced in African American communities. "This means even more so, that our theologies," according to Kelly Brown Douglas, "must engage in the kinds of analyses that confront the interlocking system of oppression which prevents our community from being whole, from being family."⁴ In other words, the theology of the grassroots must speak a prophetic voice of liberation to the systems, structures, people, and conditions that stand in the way of acquiring a just life.

Urban theological education would benefit synergistically as the locus of discernment of God's liberating act within the urban Black community through directed dialogue with the Black church and the grassroots. Seminaries, for example, could play a crucial role in bridging the gap between themselves and the institutional black church, and the gap between the church and the community. Robert Pazmin'o says "this suggests a need for a theological curriculum that addresses systemic and structural realities that perpetuate not only patterns of economic deprivation, but political and social oppression of various forms."⁵ It also underscores the importance

⁴ Kelly Brown Douglas, "To Reflect the Image of God: A Womanist Perspective on Right Relationship;" Cheryl J. Sanders, ed., Living The Intersection: Womanism and Afrocentrism in Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 74. John S. Mbiti, and Kofi Opuko, underscores this notion of community and family as essential to the African world view of religion. See John S. Mbiti, African Religion and Philosophy (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1970).

⁵ Robert W. Pazmin'o, "Designing The Urban Theological Education Curriculum", The Theological Education Curriculum: Occasional Papers (Cordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Center for Urban Ministerial Education; Contextualized Urban Theological Education Enablement Program, 1996), 17.

of a curriculum that values contextually the particular heritage and culture of the people.

Two presuppositions underscore the theological foundation of the Is This New Wine? Paper in terms of its curriculum importance toward a grassroots theology: 1) the religious, social, and cultural history of African Americans pre-dates the massive importation of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean as capital of the European slave trade; and 2) the people of the Diaspora in North America never developed an African American culture in the sense that the people of the Caribbean and South America did. Rather, what evolved was an Afro-American sub-culture.⁶ This, according to St. Clair Drake, Raboteau, Frazier, Lincoln, and others, is primarily due to the decision of the white slave masters to institutionalize the Christianization of Africans as a means of social control. Patrick Bascio writing on the persistence of Africanisms supports Drake's presupposition:

The historical circumstances in which religious traditions from Africa have been transmitted to New World societies varied from place to place and from region to region. African gods and rituals have been able to survive to a far greater extent in the Caribbean and in South America, especially in Brazil, than in the United States. Most anthropologists explain this by noting that in the Caribbean the slave came under the Catholic influence, while in the United States the atmosphere was Protestant. The more Catholic the country the slave was taken to, the greater the remnants of African tradition and lore.⁷

This further substantiates that there has been a deliberate attempt to sabotage our cultural and religious heritage since the arrival of Africans to the North American

⁶ St. Clair Drake, 19.

⁷ Patrick Bascio, The Failure of White Theology: A Black Perspective (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1994), 49.

shores. The aim of this researcher is to reconcile this disparity by examining the characteristics of the African world view of religion and the phenomenon of the African American religious experience as liberation from oppression and degradation. A theology of the grassroots, it can be demonstrated, is rooted in the African world view of religion transplanted in American through the enslaved experience right up through today's urban situation.

Having a theological curriculum of the grassroots that articulates traces of the African world view of religion and the African American religious experience is essentially what this writer hopes to recover in this research project. What is implied here is a theology of the people that is wholistic, incarnational, relational, and contextual. It is theology that comes out the biblical revelation of God's incarnated relationship in Jesus Christ and how that revelation manifests itself in the lives of oppressed people. It is a theology that comes from the pain, suffering, and celebration of persons sharing their faith with one another. And it is theology that provides instructions of survival and ethical living in an urban environment. In essence, it is distinctly an urban liberation theology borne out of the crisis of the latter decade of the twentieth century.

A Biblical Hermeneutic of "Is This New Wine?"

Liberation, faith and resistance are ideal metaphors for the articulation of the power of the gospel in an urban theological education context. The Black church, as it enters the 21st century, must reclaim its biblical and pedagogical center in the African American community. With its radical history, the Black church is in a strategic

position to shape a new biblical understanding to address the crisis identified in the Is This New Wine? Paper by recapturing its historic capacity to educate the community about its African and African American heritage, and the truth and accuracy of the Bible in its liberating motif. African American Presbyterians would amplify this by bringing the best of the Reformed Tradition and the Black religious tradition into an intersecting pedagogy of church and community transformation.

In keeping with the basic doctrines of the Reformed Faith, both the Old Testament and the New Testament have special places within the context of the “Is This New Wine?” discussion. For African Americans, the Bible is the spiritual center of, albeit oral, four hundred years of perseverance in America. “It was the means,” says Bascio, “by which African Americans acquired a new theology.”⁸

The Is This New Wine? Paper calls African American Presbyterians to interpret the Bible from their history and culture as a way of responding to the crisis in Black America. African American Presbyterian circumstance today leading into the 21st century requires a new theological approach to biblical interpretation that is highly critical of western influence.

Clarice Martin, Professor of New Testament at Colgate Rochester Theological Seminary, provides a New Testament hermeneutic for bridging the gulf between the African American theologian in the academy and the African American theologian in the Church in the construction of identity and meaning:

Black Theology(“God-Talk”) that arises from black experience and tradition begins with a norm that relates the condition of the black people to that of the biblical tradition. . . . Black Theology or “God-

⁸ Ibid. , 54.

Talk” is reflection about a particular lived history. It takes seriously the interrelatedness of black history, experience, revelation, scripture, and tradition.⁹

Further:

The African American theologian in the academy and the African American theologian in the church thus view and value the disciplines of New Testament Studies and Black Theology. They believe that these disciplines are requisite and complimentary dialogue partners and resources in the construction of identity and meaning for African American people.¹⁰

Moreover:

Black Theology is a vital and appropriately particular/ contextual resource for understanding the “particularized” identity of African American people, because it narrates (in all diverse forms and expressions) the story of African Americans and their experience as a people whose journey is marked by bondage (slavery), oppression, marginalization, and the denigration that attends White racism.¹¹

Black Theology is a biblically based faith and resistance, action-reflection paradigm that seeks to discern the liberating presence of God in the crisis of the Black community. This liberating presence is discerned in dialogue with grassroots persons’ lived experiences in the Black community as they interface with those structures that oppress and /or liberate. The lived experiences of the Black community’s insight of God’s liberating presence revealed through scripture, history, and dialogical interchange with the academy, the church and the governing structures of the community become the principle norm of curricula focus of urban theological

⁹ Clarice J. Martin, “The Christian Scriptures and Black Theology,” ed. , Forrest E. Harris, Sr. with James T. Robertson and Larry D. George, What Does It Mean To Be Black and Christian?: Pulpit, Pew, and Academy in Dialogue (Nashville: Townsend Press, 1995), 40.

¹⁰ Ibid. , 40.

¹¹ Ibid. , 41.

education. A Black theological hermeneutics, then, is the essence of the lived experiences of God's self-disclosure and revelation through dialogue and interpretation between the academy, church and community.

In the same way that the Exodus paradigm is evidence of God's self-revelation to Israel, the same is true for the Black experience in America in that God's self-disclosure is seen as inseparable from the Old Testament event and the liberating ministry of Jesus in the New Testament. Bishop Thomas Hoyt's commentary on James Cone's biblical methodology as an organizing principle points to the exodus as the decisive event in Israel's history because of two significant revelations: "God is on the side of the weak and oppressed; and God is able to break the bonds of the oppressor through God's power."¹² Both Cone and Hoyt point to Yahweh's covenant with Israel:

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples...(Exodus 19:4-5a)

In both the academy and the Black church, Black theology is a strategy of liberation grounded in the biblical tradition of God's liberating acts in history. The New Testament reaffirms this liberation theme by locating it in Jesus' understanding of his ministry and purpose when he said:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.(Luke 4:18-19)

¹² Thomas Hoyt Jr., "Biblical Interpreters and Black Theology", ed. , James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume Two: 1980-1992 (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 197.

Both of these scriptural passages, according to James Evans, reflect the inherent connection between God's self-disclosure and the manifestation of God's liberating intentions in the context of a people who suffer under the yoke of oppression.¹³ He further explicates:

In the call of Moses God reveals not new knowledge, engenders no new mysticism, but situates God's appearance in the context of and as a response to the enslavement of Israel. . . . The bondage of the people of Israel stands as an affront to the fulfilling of the covenant. . . . In the annunciation of Jesus, he draws from the oral prophetic tradition of Israel and situates himself as the anointed one whose mission it is to bring good news to the poor and oppressed. However, the reaction of the hometown folks of Nazareth turns from praise to condemnation when Jesus indicates that the poor and oppressed are not the callused, self-righteous, and complacent citizens of Israel, but are those marginalized people of Zarephath, Syria, and Sidon.¹⁴

"If the theology of Jesus Christ is a wholistic way of doing justice, as viewed from the perspective of the poor, then its principles must be redemptive and salvific for those who are oppressed."¹⁵ As it [the bible] inherently speaks to the social, political, and economic injustice faced by those on the underside of history, it becomes a revolutionary gospel that transforms the struggle of the poor into "the power of the poor in history."¹⁶

To address the question of systemic oppression and violence from an Afrocentric perspective as underscored in the question "Is This New Wine?," the African American Presbyterian Church must return to doing theology in the way suggested by

¹³ James H. Evans, 11.

¹⁴ Ibid. , 12.

¹⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez, The Power of the Poor in History (New York: Orbis Books, 3rd. printing, 1984), 171.

¹⁶ Ibid. , vii.

Gutierrez --“from the underside of history.” This is not theology or pedagogy created by the well-educated, the affluent, the powerful, or those on top. It is theology from the bottom, from the “underside,” created by the victims, the poor and the oppressed. It is not a theology and life philosophy spun out in a series of principles or axioms of timeless truth, that are then applied to the contemporary scene, but a theology and mode of redemptive actions springing up out of the poverty, the oppression, and the heart rendering conditions under which the great majority of African Americans live.

A Constructive Theological Framework

As the African American Presbyterian Church enter the twenty-first century, the need for an urban theology representative of the grassroots is long overdue. If, as Cornel West asserts in Prophesy Deliverance, “Afro-American Christianity is revolutionary, then the Black church is duty bound to reaffirm its theological roots as the church of Jesus Christ, dedicated to the eschatological and temporal liberation of the oppressed and poor.”¹⁷

A theology of grassroots persons is natural for an urban ministry pedagogy that seeks to be liberational. Given the crisis state of the Black community, the need to discern its religious capacity to cope beyond the crisis, for example, of health-care, unemployment, youth violence, addiction and ending welfare is apparent. Black Theology alone has not adequately addressed the crisis of the Black community. The same argument can be said of the Black church. As a result, from this writer’s perspective, what is needed within the academy and church is a movement to

¹⁷ Cornel West, Prophesy Deliverance: An Afro-American revolutionary Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 131-146.

synthesize Black theology, Womanist theology, African theology and Traditional African religion into an Afrocentric curriculum framework based in community. A constructive theology manifested in curriculum emerging out of the urban context would have a transforming effect on the oppressed conditions of the Black community. Moreover, the bringing together of these four theologies into an Afrocentric paradigm gives credence to the various ways the Black community talks about God.

An Afrocentric urban theological curriculum of the grassroots seeks to discern the authentic articulation of faith in God in an urban context. In it one hears the prophetic voices of four centuries of a moral struggle to break the yoke of oppression and degradation, and the contemporary agony and pain of systemic oppression. It breaks with the academic approach to Black theology by locating itself among the people, making the people the Subject of theological inquiry rather than the object of analysis.

This theology of the grassroots, which is the theology of the community engaged in the fight for their liberation has its roots in Black Theology. It respects the religiosity of the grassroots by acknowledging the various strands of religious diversity and interpretation, which may not necessarily be Christian. It insists that those who recognize their oppressed status must be the developers of this theology. And they are called upon to name their reality. Paulo Friere states:

To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namer as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Men are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.¹⁸

¹⁸ Friere, 76.

The theology of the grassroots makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection, and from that reflection will come the necessary collaboration and engagement in the struggle for their liberation. The process is cyclical as persons act on their discernment that brings fresh insight and new questions, which in turn creates another cycle of reflection and engagement. Hence, this theology is pedagogically interactive both for the theologian and the grassroots.

Like Womanist theology, a theology of the grassroots is incarnational, relational and holistic as it seeks to discern how God is active in the lives of persons through their prayers, dreams, and stories of suffering, victory, and celebration. At the same time, it places a supreme value on the teaching capacity of the community as source of consciousness. The lived experiences of the people in reflection of God's grace and mercy become the source of instruction of faith and dignity.

The curriculum goal of a theology of the grassroots is a prophetic one. The goal is to empower persons victimized by systemic oppression and violence to speak to the realized presence of God's affirming acts in their lives; to collaborate with the church and the community on common missiological concerns; and to transform the spirituality of the community by synthesizing the theology of the grassroots into a Afrocentric paradigm. It is concerned primarily with the full humanity of Black and poor people expressed in community.

The forces, the structures and the privileges and powers of racism, sexism, classism, individualism and consumerism must be grappled with in considering the larger context of urban life. This, then, leads to concerns about the inequality of

housing, education, health-care, civil rights, unemployment, and technological marginalization. As the reader takes a closer look at this goal, one will see Black theology is once again a subversive force.

The challenge, then, for a more appropriate theology, is to contextualize Black Theology as the expression of the urban grassroots and to actualize greater involvement systematically of the Black church and the academy in theological education within the community. “In an urban context,” says J. Deotis Roberts, “it is now essential to take the seminary curriculum to the churches, community centers, and pastoral/church institutes where the people are.”¹⁹ Such a curriculum against this background would employ an intimate knowledge of the ministry context; this is to say that it would be facilitated by a sensitivity *to* and involvement *in* the people’s life struggles, and that it would exercise an action and reflection methodology framed from an Afrocentric perspective. This proactive approach would move the academy and the church closer to an authentic pedagogy of urban theological education, while at the same time providing the community with the added resources for a more accurate analysis of the systemic forces working against community revitalization. It would also heighten the moral and religious consciousness of the grassroots community.

Finally, African American Presbyterian theology as interpreted from the Reformed Tradition has a particular stake in the transformation of culture and particularly the culture of African American communities. Is This New Wine?

¹⁹ J. Deotis Roberts, ProphetHood of Believers, xi.

pinpoints the analysis that Bascio calls the failure of White Theology and its historically personal-salvation focus. This is especially true for the white Presbyterian Church (USA).

Black Theology

For this critical investigation, Black theology is very important for the academy, the church and the community. There is a clear need based on the crisis in the Black community to bridge the gulf between the academy of Black theological thought and discourse, the Black church as a mediating institution and as the spiritual center, and the community as the location of disappointment, pain and suffering of oppressed African Americans. The one criticism of Black theology in recent debates is that its entrenchment in academia, hampers its effectiveness as an instrument of liberation in the Black community. The critical question to be answered is: What useful purpose does it serve to make refinements on theological arguments few people outside of the field can make sense of?

Black theology defined from the standpoint of “Is This New Wine?” and African American Presbyterians called to engage the crisis of the Black community is rooted in the spiritual insights of Traditional African Religion, the Reformed theology of the sixteenth century, the theological imagination of the enslaved African, the “Invisible Institution” as a Black church liberation model, and the creative biblical understanding of God, Jesus Christ, and the purpose of humanity. Black theology is contextual theology, for its roots are in the Black community, and borne out of an African experience of savage brutality and oppression in America.

Black theology is in need of a higher degree of discourse with the larger Black community, and other theological views outside of the academy. If urban theological education is to become the catalyst for the church and the academy to transform African American communities, a theological synthesis must occur in the curricula. Such a curriculum must be organic in nature, reflective, and an integrative system of purpose and action. It must have at its core the value of an Afrocentric pedagogy that places the African American community as its Subject.

The primary source for theological reflection and formation are the people. People, not dogma nor structures, are the primary focus of curriculum discussion. Hence, there is clearly a need for dialogue among proponents of Afrocentrism and Black theology based in community. Urban policy makers would also benefit from this interchange. Black theology integrated in the Afrocentric discussion would provide the theological critique necessary for a more accurate analysis of European classical hegemony. Moreover, it would give impetus to the idea of contextualization within the African American community. For Black theology, Afrocentrism would provide the appropriate center in the community for a more thorough anthropological and theological discourse of the African American situation. Together Afrocentrists and Black theologians would advance the connection of the Black church and the Black community and subsequently the transformation of both.

For Black theology to effectively address the problems of the Black community, it must do so both at the macro and micro levels. It must be both prophetic and pastoral in its liberation efforts. Black theology in the 21st century demands a

systemic investigation of the vicissitudes of urban life. In this way it is regenerated into a theology of the grassroots. It is a theology that asks the question: What does God have to say about systemic violence perpetrated on the urban communities?

To understand the connection of the Is This New Wine? Paper to Black theology, it is important to understand what has been said about Black theology in the past thirty years. Mark Chapman in his book Christianity on Trial: African American Religious Thought Before and After Black Power, provides an insightful capsulation when he states: “the Civil Rights period that produced major revolutionary changes in the United States for Black life also produced a radically new way of perceiving and talking about God and God’s activity in the history of the Black community.”²⁰

In the last thirty years Black theology has attempted to serve as the instrument of liberation in the Black church. Along with Gayraud Wilmore, it was James Cone who was responsible for providing the theological framework on which Black theology is based. Together with Black theologians such as Cecil Cone, J. Deotis Roberts, Joseph Washington, Major Jones, Joseph Johnson Jr., and William Jones, they are viewed as the indisputable progenitors of the academic Black theology movement. This movement consciously separated the biblical understanding of the gospel from white Christianity and identified it with the liberation of the oppressed. They and others transformed Black theology into a systematic discipline of thought and action.

George B. Thomas poses in an article entitled: “African Religion: A New Focus for Black Theology” an important Afrocentric question in response to the early

²⁰ Mark L. Chapman, Christianity on Trial: African-American Religious Thought Before and After Black Power (New York: Orbis Books, 1996).

assertions of Black theology that support this writer's argument for a synthesized Black theology. Under the subtitle: "Christianity as an African Religion- Imported, Imposed or Indigenized?" He writes:

First, Christianity must be disengaged from being defined as an exclusively white Western or Western oriented religion. . . . Christianity has its own history, only a part of which is tied in with European Christianity. This may also be true of the branch of Christianity emerging out of the black religious experience in America. Therefore, it is important to exponents and adherents of black religion in America that Christianity in Africa be inherently appreciated as an African religion, shaped in part by traditional African religions.²¹

Black theology says, Marsha S. Haney, Presbyterian missiologist, is:

. . . a distinct theological position within Christian religion which uses the experiences of black people as the starting point for all discussion about God and Divine relationship to and involvement in the universe. It is based upon a sociological and economical context apart from that which is generally identified as (so called) traditional Western theology, but which is, in fact, White western theology. White western theology, by contrast, has been structured primarily in keeping with the sociopolitical and economic events in Europe and theological tenets growing out of that context.²²

Power and Privilege

This acute analysis by Haney further supports the argument that white western theology is a racist construct borne primarily and fundamentally of a fifteenth century European ideology grounded in a capitalistic system of power and privilege. This specious fabrication is lifted up as the model that assigns value and status to any theological discussion. Aligning itself with capitalism serves to provide white

²¹ George B. Thomas aka Ndugu G.B. T'Ofori-Atta "African Religion: A New Focus for Black Theology", 82.

²² Marsha Snulligan Haney, Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Islam and the Protestant African American Churches (Dissertation: February, 1994), 51.

theology with legitimate access to the system sanctioned by the state. Such analysis of power and privilege is crucial for a curriculum of urban theological education.

A primary reason for including this issue of power and privilege in urban theological education is because “this country” says Nelly Fuller “was built on a false declaration of independence and constitutionality.”²³ “Racism and white supremacy is surfacing as the primary issue all over the world. It is the only issue that brings together victims of racism.”²⁴

This study argues that effective urban theological education requires attention to the issue of white power and privilege. An urban theological education curriculum framed in a Black theological critique systemically provides an in-depth power analysis for the praxis of ministry. This praxis analysis is necessary if there is to be social and political change. It raises new questions and methods of ministry in African American communities. It further contributes to bridging the gulf between the academy, the church, and the community.

James Cone who initiated the theological debate in 1969 in his polemical book, Black Theology and Black Power, states:

The goal of Black Theology is to prepare the minds of blacks for freedom so that they will be ready to give all for it. Black Theology must speak *to* and *for* black people as they seek to remove the structures of white power that hovers over their being, stripping them of their blackness.²⁵

Further:

²³ Neely Fuller, Jr. The United Independent Compensatory/Code/System/Concept: a textbook/workshop for thought, speech and/or action for victims of racism (white supremacy), 32.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ James Cone, Black Theology and Black Power (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 117.

The task of Black Theology, then, is to analyze the black man's condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ with the purpose of creating a new understanding of black dignity among black people, and providing the necessary soul in that people, to destroy white racism. . . . To carve out a Black Theology based on black oppression will of necessity mean the creation of new values independent of and alien to the values of white society. The values must be independent because they must arise from the needs of black people. They will be alien because white American "Christian" values are based in racism. . . . When Black Theology calls for a new value-system, it is oriented in a single direction: the bringing to bear of the spirit of self-determination upon the consciousness of black people. It is the creation of a new cultural ethos among oppressed blacks of America, so that they are no longer dependent on the white oppressor for their understanding of truth, reality, or -and this is the key - to what ought to be done about the place of black suffers in America. Black religion and black people can never become what they ought to be as long as the content of religion is a distorted reflection of the enslaver. To be free means to be free to create new possibilities for existence.²⁶

Black Theology as God-Talk

Black theology ("God-Talk" as defined by Cone), examines the contextual and structural dislocation of the Black community. It emerged out of the Black religious history and tradition to give a new understanding of what it means to be Black and Christian in America in the end of the Twentieth century. For African American Presbyterians it calls into question their relationship to a Reformed theology that began under the leadership of William Farel (1489-1565), Jacques Lefevre (1450-1536), and John Calvin (1509-1564) sixteenth century urban reformers in Geneva Switzerland.²⁷ This question of the validity of the relationship or its very existence is implicit in the "Is This New Wine? Paper."

²⁶ Ibid. , 117-130.

²⁷ John H. Leith, Introduction To The Reformed Tradition (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 36.

Preston Williams presses the question even further in his argument of

Presbyterian theology:

Calvinism's vision was flawed because in America it did not develop properly the implications of God's sovereignty especially in relation to its teaching concerning the covenantal community. It spoke about an exclusive covenant and this had the effect of cultivating attitudes of superiority on the part of one class of persons over against another or it permitted a too easy justification of inequality.²⁸

Black Theology emerging as it did in the 1960s' "black protest and civil rights movement" can only be understood, says George C.L. Cummings, against the backdrop of the African slave trade, the middle-passage, 244 years of slavery and 100 years of segregation as African-American people struggle to affirm their God-given humanity and to attain liberation.²⁹ In this sense, Black theology is perhaps the most vital systematic critique of racial injustice provided to the Black church. It rightly charges that white Protestant theology has not adequately addressed the struggles of black and oppressed people. Black theology is Black peoples' understanding of how God is actively involved in their relief from socio-economic marginalization. The task then of urban theological education, is to provide a responsible analysis through reflection and praxis of the expressions of God-talk among the African Americans in urban communities.

²⁸ Preston N. Williams, "Calvinism, Racism, and Economic Institutions," Reformed Faith and Economics, Robert L. Strivers, ed. (New York: University Press of America, 1989), 58.

²⁹ George C.L. Cummings, A Common Journey: Black Theology (USA) and Latin American Liberation Theology (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 1.

Womanist Theology

Moving from a posture of Black power and protest, to a pedagogical position of acceptance and respectability within the academy, one might assert that Black Theology as praxis is its third phase of evolution. African American men dominated the first three decades of Black theology in its academic appearance. With few exceptions, these academic scholars modeled the patriarchal structures of white society as normative for the Black community to the exclusion of Black women. Katie Cannon, one of the early leaders of Womanist theologians to assert the paradigm shift to include Black women's theological voice, observed: "The most underrepresented area in Black history and Black theology concerns Black women".³⁰ To be a more comprehensive strategy in addressing the crisis of the Black community, Black theology must actualize the recent liberating voices of African American women in the academy, the church, and the community.

Excluded at the inception from the scholarly enterprise of African American theological discourse, Black women have made a significant contribution to the contextualization of African American theology as a discipline. Womanist theology was first coined by Katie Cannon in 1985 in her article on "*The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness*". Cannon articulates the importance of telling the stories of African American women who have been carefully and systematically left out by all other writing sects. The writing, reading, and telling of her story is paramount to gaining a true understanding of who she is, and how she has handled difficult

³⁰ Katie G. Cannon, Black Womanist Ethics (Atlanta: American Academy of Religion, 1988), 95.

situations over years of oppression. Cannon upholds this concern in her book Black Woman Ethics, when she writes:

The story of the Afro-American has been told quite coherently and has repeatedly left the Black woman out of it in significant ways. Seldom in history has a group of women been so directly responsible for exerting indispensable efforts to insure the well-being of both the black family and the white. At the same time the black woman is placed in such a sharp disadvantaged position as to accept obligingly the recording of her own story by the very ones who systematically leaves her out.³¹

Womanist theology alongside a critique of Black theology provides for a more effective strategy of Black liberation. Black womanist theologians Katie Cannon, Jacquelyn Grant, Delores Williams, Kelly Brown-Douglas, Marcia Riggs, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Cheryl Sanders, and others represent new voices in the dialectic and polemic of Black theology. Writing from the historical, religious, and literary experience of Black women, they began their assertion of a womanist perspective with the affirmation of Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Alice Walker's first introduction of the term "womanish" in her book 1983 In Search of Our Mother's Gardens.

The primary source for doing theology are the narratives, autobiographies, novels, poetry, prayers, and other writing, observed Cheryl Sanders, that conveys Black women's traditions, culture, and history:

The method developed to appropriate these sources can also be summarized in terms of its celebrative, critical, and constructive intent, inclusive of 1) the celebration of black women's historical struggles and strength; 2) the critique of various manifestations of black women's oppression in terms of race, class, and sex; and 3) the

³¹ Ibid. , 75.

construction of black women's distinctive theological and ethical claims towards a liberative praxis.³²

It is the aggravated "tri-dimensional oppression"³³ of classism, sexism, and racism, that Jacquelyn Grant and Katie Cannon talk about, that makes African American women's voices profoundly critical in asserting a theology of the grassroots both within and without the Black theological enterprise. This analysis supports the thesis of discerning how women who are systematically oppressed talk about the presence and power of God. It also empowers them to speak out against oppressive systems and to work collaboratively to bring about productive change in the community. Womanist theology, asserts Grant, begins with the experience of Black women as its point of departure.³⁴ Womanism is a way of relating, says Kelly Brown Douglas, in the reflection of the image of God.

The womanist way of relating fosters life and wholeness for the African American community, even as the community struggles for these precise goals in the face of an interlocking system of multidimensional oppression. . . . To be sure, the religion of enslaved women affirmed the presence of God in their efforts to promote a life of wholeness for themselves and their families. . . . For us then to reflect what it means to be in the image of God, is for us to be in relationship.³⁵

Marcia Riggs supports the notion of a theology toward the grassroots as she outlines four tasks of Womanist theologians from an ethical perspective:

³² Cheryl Sanders, ed., Living The Intersection: Womanism and Afrocentrism in Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 158.

³³ Jacquelyn Grant, "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Experience as a Source of Doing Theology, with Special Reference to Christology," Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center: 132 (Spring 1986), 199.

³⁴ Ibid., 198.

³⁵ Kelly Brown Douglas, "To Reflect the Image of God: A Womanist Perspective of Right Relationship," Living The Intersection: Womanism and Afrocentrism in Theology, ed., Cheryl J. Sanders (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 76-77.

1) uncovering the roots of a womanist tradition through examination and reintegration of black women's experience into black history in particular and American history in general; 2) debunking social myths so as to undermine the black woman's acceptance of sexist oppression, the black man's acceptance of patriarchal privilege, and white woman's acceptance of white racist privilege; 3) constructing black womanist theology and religious ethics in light of the first two tasks and to broaden these disciplines to include nontraditional bases and sources for theological and ethical reflection; 4) envisioning human liberation(not solely racial/ethnic-group or gender-group liberation) under God; that is black womanist are proposing a decidedly inclusive perspective that is acutely aware of the need for the simultaneous liberation from all oppression.³⁶

Black Theology as Praxis

Forrest Harris provides yet another perspective that supports a constructive theology of the oppressed by viewing the Black church as a mediating institution among its members, the Black community and the social structures that affect Black existence. He brings the church, community and academy closer together through his praxisological analysis concurrent with theological reflection and social analysis when he asserts:

The task of every Christian is to do theology in terms of seeking to understand how God acts in history and in the life of the community. . . . Black Theology affirms that the "black experience" of survival and liberation are in solidarity with the redemptive and liberating acts of God. . . . The Task, then, of black theology is to interpret how God is a concrete part of the black experience and to articulate the conditions of God's involvement in the particular experience.³⁷

³⁶ Marcia Riggs, Awake, Arise, and Act: A Womanist Call for Black Liberation (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994), 2.

³⁷ Forrest E. Harris, Ministry For Social Crisis, 55.

Harris' analysis is essentially a model for urban theological education. The dichotomy of the academy and the Black church as God's instrument of liberation merges together, for Harris, out of necessity of the crisis in the Black community. Hence, the deepening social problems of the Black community demand theological renewal of praxis in theological education. Praxis, as such, in urban ministry involves critical reflection on present action, critical memory to uncover the past in the present, and creative imagination to envision the future in the present. It is confrontational, it invites constructive self-criticism, and it is a source of affirmation for the church's ministry. Eldin Villafañe, reflecting upon the curriculum of urban theological education, focused more clearly the distinction between practice and praxis:

Practice involves such things as preaching, counseling, community organizing, and administration; while praxis involves the doing of these skills, but it adds theological reflection upon what is being done, why it is done, how it is done, and what could be done. The action must seek to transform the world, and theological reflection must be done to understand and shape the acting process.³⁸

African Theology

African theology is the third element worthy of inclusion in framing a curriculum of urban theological education. By including African theology along with Black theology and womanist theology in a curriculum discussion, a more coherent world view emerges. It is the missing link to making a conscious impact on the community's self development.

It is clear from the outset that Black theology is, above all, a theology of liberation. African theology, on the other hand, is a theology of indigenization, or

³⁸ Eldin Villafañe, Seek The Peace of the City, 129.

more specifically, Africanization.³⁹ African Theology asserts a cultural paradigm rooted in Traditional African Religion. In spite of their similarities, according to Josiah Young, the two theologies differ radically in theological focus:

African theology represents efforts of black Africans to make the Christian theology inherited from Europe continuous with African traditional religious thought. . . . Black theology in the United States is, by contrast, sharply political, condemning institutions and attitudes that exacerbate black suffering. . . . It is a theology of liberation because it arises from an identification with oppressed blacks of America seeking to interpret the gospel in light of the black condition.⁴⁰

Young discerned, through his research of African theology, that African theologians rely upon three principal sources for their work: 1) the Bible, 2) the African independent churches, and 3) African Traditional Religion.⁴¹ He writes:

African traditional religion is the most important source of African theology. African theologians concentrate largely on the creative interaction between elements of that religion and Christianity. In deed, discussion of African traditional religion is indispensable for an analysis of African theology.⁴²

Traditional African religious pedagogy may well become the impetus needed to transform African Christianity in America. Similarly, African American Christianity makes similar claims upon the relevance of African religion. George B. Thomas sees African Religion as a new world force. Citing an observation written by John S. Mbiti, Thomas writes:

³⁹ Josiah U. Young, *Black and African Theologies: Siblings, or Distant Cousins?* (New York: Orbis Books, 1986.), 1. Young's aim is to create a more clear particularity of African theological discourse.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2. Young uses the terms "Africanization" and "indigenization" synonymously to denote the effort of African theologians to make uniquely African the Christianity that came to them by way of colonization. The term describes the present scope of the African theological focus.

⁴¹ For the purpose of establishing the theological foundation of this project, I will focus primarily on Traditional African Religion.

⁴² Young, *Black and African Theologies*, 63.

1) that African religions “should be regarded as preparation for the Christian Gospel.” 2) that “Christianity may be seen as fulfillment of traditional African religions,” and 3) that “African traditional religiosity can become an enrichment for Christian presence in Africa.”⁴³

By connecting Black theology and Traditional African Religion, the writer is making the claim that Black theology is more than an animated form of white Christianity. It is a matter of substance and validity that frames the reality of God and community in the African American experience. The synthesis is a theology rooted in the depths of the African American community.

Robert Hood’s anthropological approach makes a major contribution to the African and Black theological conversation in his book, Must God Remain Greek? He raises the critical issue whether Christianity within traditional third world cultures, where Christian faith is going from strength to strength in contrast to the West and the East where it is in a state of “suspended animation,” must be filtered through Graeco-Roman religious thought and patterns in order to be considered legitimate and authentically Christian.⁴⁴ He raises two introductory questions:

Do Christians from Third World cultures have to become imitation Europeans or imitation North Americans before they can be considered fitting contributors to the formation and shaping of Christian thought? Must they steadily continue to contribute to their own invisibility within Christian thought by surrendering traditions and cultures long dismissed as “pagan,” “animistic,” “heathen,” and “polytheistic”?⁴⁵

⁴³ George B. Thomas, 79.

⁴⁴ Robert E. Hood, Must God Remain Greek?: Afro Cultures and God-Talk (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 8.

⁴⁵ Ibid. , 8.

All of this says, Bevans, is part of Hood's project to demythologize what he considers an all-too-Greek-Roman, Eurocentric tradition, in order that the values and cultural expressions of other non-western, non-Greek-influenced cultures can find expression in Christian theology and worship.⁴⁶

It is fair to state based on the above assessment that Black Theology is an expression of the history, symbols, rituals, and narratives reflected and discovered in African American culture. Black theology is best understood, according to James Evans, "as the convergence of an African-derived worldview, the complexities of the experience of slavery, oppression, survival, rebellion, and adjustment in the New World, and their encounter with the biblical text."⁴⁷ The idea of integrating Black theology, Womanist theology, African theology and Afrocentrism into a pedagogical framework located in the African American community is most vital to the question "Is This New Wine?"

The significant objective of a constructive theological approach would provide the relevant context for a more focused and utilitarian theology. More importantly, it offers enormous opportunities for more creative theological work in the future among Africans on both sides of the Atlantic. Evans further amplifies this point when he states:

The syncretism of African American theology, African theology, and Afrocentrism provides the figural interpretation needed in bridging the gulf between the African American church and the African American community. Such a merger becomes the single lens both for reflection of the present condition, as well as the projection of

⁴⁶ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 55.

⁴⁷ James H. Evans, 2.

something yet to be. This makes for a more simple theological biblical interpretation of the complexity of the African American experience.⁴⁸

African Americans are beginning to recognize the important contributions of African religions to Christianity in America through the total Black religious experience in personal and corporate ways. It is encouraging that Black theologians have already begun to incorporate notions of Afrocentric principles as a critical element of assessing oppressed conditions of the Black community. Afrocentrism as a cultural-religious paradigm in the liberation struggle is becoming prominent in the third decade of Black theology and among the new generation of African American theologians.

In concluding this section, the origin of the Is This New Wine? Paper, and its implications to Afrocentricity as a paradigm of change in addressing the crisis in the Black community have briefly been examined. The historical survey provided an antithesis for a more synthesized theology of the grassroots. The proposition of integrating Black Theology, African Theology and Womanist theology as a paradigmatic model for African American Presbyterians to affirm their religious and cultural heritage represents a new approach of doing ministry and mission.

A Black Theology of the 21st century must see among the cultural, economic, political and physical decline of our contemporary urban condition, possibilities for community transformation and possibilities for realizing our social, political and spiritual ideal. This writer is convinced that a synthesized theology of the grassroots is crucial to advancing urban ministry and urban theological education. The next section

⁴⁸ Ibid. , 81.

will frame for discussion the African worldview as foundation for Black theology and urban theological education as an appropriate paradigm of the Is This New Wine? Paper.

Traditional African Religious Worldview

“The first thing that makes African American Christian education different from American- and European-centered concepts of Christian education says, Wilmore, prior to any denominational distinction, is the high value it places upon the ancient Nile Valley civilization as powerful contributors to Judaism after the descent of the Jacob family into Egypt (circa 1600 B.C.) and as the cradle of early Christianity.”⁴⁹

The conception of an African worldview is central for all research interested in African people. It is a well-established fact, that from 4,000,000 BC, all the way up to the appearance of modern human beings 200,000 years ago, Africa was the cradle of the human race. This according to Charles Finch, an Afrocentrist physician, also makes Africa the crucible of the Judeo-Christian experience.⁵⁰

Citing the works of DuBois and Diop, African scholar and missiologist Ndugu G.B. T’Ofori-Atta, underscores the thesis that Africa was the origin of the first humans that initiated the development of other peoples on the earth. “These accounts might have some parallel with the biblical accounts of the feats of Nimrod (Genesis 10:8-14) the First Ethiopian or Cushite Architect, Empire Builder, King, General, favor with

⁴⁹ Wilmore, Presbyterian General Assembly Minutes, 1997

⁵⁰ Charles Finch, “The Bible and the African Experience: A Response to Dr. Charles Copher.” The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center. The First Pan-African Christian Church Conference; July, 1988, Atlanta, Georgia.

God and with hunting for a hobby.”⁵¹ African scholars Davison, Carruthers, Hilliard, Diop, Clark, Ben-Jochann all assert that the transmitters of early Christianity were non-white.

According to Melva Costen, some branches of the African heritage include direct involvement in the shaping of Judeo-Christianity. From the time Abraham came out of Ur and settled in Egypt, through the time when the church wrestled with the formulation of theological statements and the shaping of significant creeds, Africa has played a critical role.⁵²

Over the course of this research of the African world view, certain propositions and theologies emerge as a guide post in the exploration. Seven are set forth here, although previously stated or implied:

1. Africans were among the earliest builders of societies, governments, religious systems as manifested in ritual, myths, symbols, stories, and ideas that affirms persons of African descent as contributors to world civilization;
2. Africa was the cradle of civilization based on the conception of one Supreme God, Creator of the Universe and this belief in one Supreme Being pre-dates that of the Jews several thousand years before Abraham;⁵³

⁵¹ Ndugu G.B. T’Ofori-Atta, “Africa: The Physical Setting,” *African Roots: Towards an Afrocentric Christian Witness*, ed. , Michael I.N. Dash; L. Rita Dixon; Darius L. Swann; Ndugu T’Ofori-Atta (SCP/ Third World Literature Publishing House, 1994), 54.

⁵² Melva Costen, *African American Christian Worship*, 14.

⁵³ Ibid. , 36.

3. Theology of Black Presbyterians is informed by a consciousness of the significance of Africa as the Mother Continent of humanity--the place where God's presence was first made known to human beings;
4. Judaism was shaped in the Nile Valley civilization before the Exodus;
5. Early Christianity received some of its most potent influences from ancient African religions practiced in Egypt, Ethiopia, and Nubia;
6. Africans were among the first Christian bishops, theologians, and preachers;⁵⁴
7. God is an African God because God first revealed God self to African people.⁵⁵

Traditional African Religion

A close examination reveals similarities in Reformed theology and African theology. Both esteem a high conception of the sovereignty of God and a holistic understanding of the purpose and nature of society. For African American Presbyterians the connection of divine justice and the practice of human institutions undergird their theology. The Is This New Wine? Paper brings into focus the theology of a sovereign God as interpreted by a sixteenth century notion that all persons are valued as co-creators in the eyes of God.

⁵⁴ Gayraud Wilmore, "Theological Dimensions of Black Presbyterianism," Periscope ~3: African American Presbyterianism-Preparing For The 21st Century, 185 Years of Ministry (Racial Ethnic Ministry Unit, Presbyterian Church USA, 1992), 12.

⁵⁵ Mark A. Lomax, The Effect of an Afrocentric Christain Hermeneutic In A Developing Congregation (Dayton: United Theological Seminary, Unpublished Doctor of Ministry Project, 1995), 56.

The study of Traditional African Religion is a pedagogical value of urban theological education, and a fundamental necessity in response to the question “Is This New Wine?” If incorporated in an urban ministry curriculum it would profoundly shape the criteria for assessing the community. As Afrocentric consciousness increases in African American theological circles and in the Black community the study of Traditional African Religion cannot be ignored.

As a cultural phenomenon, Traditional African Religion is measurably different to the western phenomenological and scientific world where everything is reasoned and measured. In the African world, religion permeates all aspects of African life to the point, says Kwame Gyekye, “that all actions and thoughts have a religious meaning and are inspired or influenced by a religious point of view.”⁵⁶ Africans believe that God is the Creator, and the universe is an extension of that creative ontology. Ghanaian theologian and teacher, Kofi Asare Opoku, explains The African World View accordingly:

Everything begins with God, in the African world view that explains how everything in the universe came to be makes the belief quite clear. While everything in the universe had a clear beginning, God has no beginning, and the Akan name, *Tetekwaframo*, He who is there now as from ancient times, make it clear that God has always been in existence and will continue to be.⁵⁷

Such a view is advocated for in a curriculum of urban theological education. Traditional African Religion is built into the culture of African people with the understanding that God’s salvific activities in history exist as an unequivocal presence

⁵⁶ Kwame Gyekye, African Cultural Values: An Introduction (Philadelphia: Sankofa Publishing, 1996.), 3.

⁵⁷ Kofi Asare Opoku, “African Traditional Religion: An Enduring Heritage.” Journal of The International Theological Center, The First Pan-African Christian Conference, July, 1988 Atlanta, Georgia, 18.

from the beginning of time. Peter Paris, in his book The Spirituality of African People, states that:

Religion permeates every dimension of African life. In spite of their many and varied religious systems the ubiquity of religious consciousness among African peoples constitutes their single most important common characteristic.⁵⁸

Traditional African Religion is practical theology. It is not an isolated experience. It is relational in nature to all things in creation. Accordingly, J. Deotis Roberts stated, “all life is fundamentally religious; religion is social and the social is religion.”⁵⁹ Religion as the very fabric of life in the community provides the prescription for the moral betterment of the whole community. Hence, the community as a place of instruction and belonging is a pre-requisite of the African religious world view. Gyekye further explains:

In African life and thought, the religious is not distinguished from the non-religious, the sacred from the secular, the spiritual from the material. . . . to be born into the African society is to be born into a culture that is intensely and pervasively religious and that means, and requires, participating in the religious beliefs and rituals of the community. One cannot detach oneself from the religion of the community, for to do so would be to isolate oneself from the group and to disrupt one’s sense of communal membership and security and lose much of the meaning of life.⁶⁰

In Traditional African Religion the community and the family form the foundation of theological understanding, while class structure and individualism play a primary role in Western theology. The family is the key to African culture.

⁵⁸ Peter Paris, The Spirituality of African People (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 27.

⁵⁹ J. Deotis Roberts, Roots of a Black Future: Family and Church (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 5.

⁶⁰ Gyekye, 4.

According to John Mbiti, the African sense of community and kinship “has been one of the strongest forces in traditional African life.”⁶¹ For Gyekye, the value of collective action, mutual aid, cooperation and interdependence are necessary conditions not only for an individual’s well being, but also for the successful achievement of even the most difficult undertaking of the community.⁶²

Opoku further states:

To be human means to belong to a family or community. . . . Community is the context of human existence. One’s humanity is defined by a sense of belonging, for it is not enough to be a human being unless one shows a sense of, and participation in, community. . . . Religion is not an isolated aspect of the community’s life, but permeates every facet of the community’s existence.⁶³

John S. Mbiti brings both Opoku and Gyekye statements in sharper focus when he states:

What then is the individual and where is his [or her] place in the community? In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual; for the individuals depend on the corporate group.⁶⁴

Such a notion supports the anticipated outcome of this project. That is, the community taking responsibility for itself. It directly addressed the crisis in African-American community in a holistic and healthy manner. According to James Evans,

⁶¹ John S. Mbiti, African Religion and Philosophies (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1970), 36.

⁶² Ibid., African Cultural Values, 38.

⁶³ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁴ John S. Mbiti, 141.

this emphasis on the group's role in the formation of the individual is a radical departure from the individualism that has marked European-America theological anthropology since the time of Augustine.⁶⁵

Summary

Finally, Traditional African Religion focus on the individual and the community is of fundamental importance in shaping a pedagogical response to the crisis in the African American community as identified in the Is This New Wine? Paper. The strength of the African American church in the 21st century is its ability to listen to the community and its instructional capability to provide people with a strong moral sense of community. Historical analysis shows clearly that for the past 250 years the Black Church has been the mainstay of community life. It has been the mediating institution in the Black community in times of crisis. Hence, the African American community must reclaim the Africanness of the meaning of community that is so much a part of its African past.

This writer would argue that the reclamation of the African past must take place in the academy, the church and the community working together in order to regain the communal consciousness which was weakened by slavery. By reclaiming traditional African values and beliefs would strengthen the Black community's sense of social responsibility, encourage the sharing and pooling of resources for the furtherance of community development, assure the willingness to work and contribute to the health and welfare of the community, promote pride of one's self and history, and promote a sense of kinship, love and care for neighbor. The greatest challenge, then, of the

⁶⁵ Evans, 102.

academy, the African American Presbyterian Church and the Black community today is to perpetuate this sense of community among Black people.

CHAPTER V

METHODOLOGY

"People see God when the Church becomes involved in the love and care of its church members and community."
Lillian Moore, student

Research Design

This chapter describes and analyzes the role of the academy, church, and grassroots community in the development of an urban theological education curriculum. The findings are reported in three major sections. The first section presents a summary of the research design. An analysis of the actual and ideal perceptions of the academy and the church in the community are reviewed in the second section. This second section also presents a description of selected field interviews with persons of the grassroots community. And the third section presents a curriculum ministry model resulting from the research.

This research design was granted official approval October, 1995 by representatives of United Theological Seminary. In selecting an appropriate way in which to explore the bridging elements of the academy, church and community, the reader should know that this type of research design called ethnography is used to focus on a detailed description and analysis of a particular group or subgroup in a community.

Most ministries in New Jersey are, in some sense, urban. The idea of the academy, church, and community creating together a community ethos of

teaching and learning, faith and resistance, knowing and doing, thought and discourse based upon African, and African American core values and beliefs for community revitalization is pivotal to the methodology of this research. This didactic and dialectic interaction with the community's theological and spiritual expression in reflection of the question "Is This New Wine?" frames the essence of an urban theological education core curriculum.

Although qualitative research can include many different approaches to studying a problem, ethnography is used to discern the articulated spiritual sophistication of grassroots persons as curriculum information to bridge the theological and pedagogical gulf between the academy, the church and the community. Ethnography is the field research method of cultural anthropology. An ethnographer observes, analyzes and reports the behavior, customs, interactions, social networks, feelings and artifacts of a subject group. Ethnography applied to urban theological education 'core' curriculum development can uncover the structure of meaning that undergirds a community's life.

"Since the purpose of the ethnographic method is simply to describe a particular culture", says Kenneth D. Bailey, "the ethnographer generally has few hypotheses and no structured questionnaire."¹

Further:

Rather than proving any specific hypotheses, his or her goal is a general one: to describe the culture or subculture in as much detail as possible, including language, customs, value, religious

¹ Kenneth D. Bailey, Methods of Social Research (New York: Free Press, 1978), 221.

ceremonies, and laws. Generally this requires that the observer become, if possible, a participant observer. In fact, the researcher's goal in many ethnographic studies is actually to resocialize himself or herself into the culture that he or she is attempting to describe."²

In recent years the methods once employed only in primitive settings have been adapted for use in more complex urban-industrial society. "Ethnography" says Goetz and LeCompte, "as an investigative model is rooted in anthropology, and particularly in the desire of late nineteenth - and early twentieth century culture-theorists."³ It is an "analytic description [s]or reconstruction of intact cultural scenes and groups . . . that recreates for the reader the shared beliefs, practices, artifacts, folk knowledge, and behaviors of some group of people".⁴ The adaptation and application of ethnographic methods to bridge the academy and urban church ministry context is the purpose of this research.

In this study ethnography examines through a process of reflection and action the religious and teaching values of urban grassroots persons in a dialogical relation with the church and the academy. In selecting an appropriate way in which to study the problem of bridging the theological and pedagogical gulf between the seminary, the church and the community, the reader should know that the word ethnography literally means "portrait of people."⁵ The main purpose of doing this ethnographic research is to describe the cultural relationship of the

² Ibid. , 222.

³ Judith Preissle Goetz and Margaret Diane LeCompte, Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research (Orlando: Academic Press, Inc., 1984), 13.

⁴ Ibid. , 2.

⁵ Barabra Kraynyak Luise, "An Ethnography of Homeless Families: Life in a Shelter" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1995), 8. C. Gremain, Ethnography: The Method. In Munhall P., & Oiler C., The Nursing Research: A Qualitative Perspective, 147-162. (Norway, Connecticut: Appleton-Century-Croft Company, 1986).

African American Presbyterian church and grassroots African American community of East Orange, New Jersey. Leininger, says Luise, suggests that “when there is virtually no knowledge generated in a specific area and when it is the researcher’s goal to grasp the totality of the human experience,”⁶ then ethnographic study is appropriate.

An ethnographic research approach is best suited for exploring curricula themes designed to benefit the theological academy, the urban church, (and more particularly African American Presbyterian congregations) and the grassroots community. Such an approach yielded contextually rich information that provided the database for the study. It is an approach to research that used action-reflection and an action-research model to help people get into activities leading toward social change or to improve what they are already doing. It joins both action and learning in a theological form of education.

An argument can be made for the use of this particular research design for the following reasons. First, when the thesis of the research was conceived in a United Theological Seminary doctoral peer group meeting of “New Wine Fellows” in Louisville, Ky. in March of 1996, there was little knowledge generated in the area of curricula development outside of the academy or church pertaining to grassroots theology. Therefore, several questions for investigation needs to be addressed before more complex research could be done. It was this researcher’s belief that a non-traditional classroom approach that was dialogical in

⁶ Barabra Kraynyak Luise, “An Ethnography of Homeless Families: Life in a Shelter,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1995), 9. Michael Leininger, Qualitative Research Methods in Nursing (Orlando: Grune and Straton, Inc., 1985), 39.

nature to discern the faith and meaning-in-context would serve the greatest purpose for understanding the dimensions of urban problems and the surviving theology and pedagogy, as well as describing new areas of inquiry that could be addressed in subsequent research studies. Also, since the literature written up to this date on urban ministry focused less on grassroots theological expressions and more on either the historical and theological evolution of urban ministry or on the pathological descriptions of the African American community, it was determined that an ethnographic approach seemed best suited for a more integral response to the question “Is This New Wine?”

In conclusion, it was only after the researcher became convinced of the curricula importance of urban theological education outside of the traditional approach to theological education, i.e. , the grassroots population, and after a specific African American Presbyterian Church and community were identified as contributing to the validity of the study, that an in-depth literature review was performed to gain added insight about the variables to be studied. This process then prompted the researcher to choose an appropriated method to study the issue under investigation in the most feasible way.

Weakness of the Research

This selective ethnographic research of grassroots theology and pedagogy revealed various theoretical and methodological weaknesses that resulted in failure to capture fully the process of faith and meaning-in-context. Among these weaknesses are the following:

1. Lack of design time to conduct a pre-interview of church persons and student's perceptions of the grassroots understanding of faith and resistance in systemic ways.
2. The need to employ more intentional community organizing techniques to engage the grassroots community of East Orange.
3. In depth interviews with students and church members were brief and infrequent.
4. The Afrocentric framework needed to be more than one session rather, it should have been a recurring theme in each session and discussion group.
5. A larger sampled group of grassroots persons interviewed would engendered a greater diversity of theological expression and experiences.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher was defined as instructor, facilitator, leader and participant-observer. Negotiating these various roles required particular research skills for maintaining a clear method of data collection and focus on the research objective. "Ethnographers often use participant observation as a strategy for both listening to people and watching them in natural settings."⁷ "Participation in the daily activities of any group helps the participant to eventually acculturate the natives' cultural knowledge."⁸ "As the fieldworker observes and participates, he

⁷ James P. Spradley, The Ethnographic Interview (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 32.

⁸ Oswald Werner, and G. Mark Schoepfle, Systematic Fieldwork Volume 1: Foundations of Ethnography and Interviewing (Oakland, CA: Sage Publication, 1987), 80.

[or she] becomes aware of the complexities and contradictions in what people say and in what they do.”⁹

Participant Observation

“Participant observation is the primary technique used by ethnographers to gain access to data”.¹⁰ “In fact, skilled ethnographers often gather most of their data through participant observation and many causal, friendly conversations.”¹¹ This process is time consuming. “The researcher shares in the people’s day-to-day activities, watching as they eat, fight, and dance, listens to their commonplace and exciting conversations, and slowly begins to live and understand life as they do.”¹² The discipline required for the researcher is the ability to remain detached from their life. A crucial dimension of the researcher’s participant observation role states Goetz and LeCompte is:

Participant observation serves to elicit from people their definitions of reality and the organizing constructs of their world. Because there are expressed in particular linguistic patterns, it is crucial that the ethnographer be familiar with the language variations or argot used by participants. . . . One problems researchers may encounter is that participant reports of their activities and beliefs often are discrepant with their observed behavior. As a means of determining how people view and behave within their world, participant observation enables the researchers to verify that individuals are doing what they or the researcher thinks they are doing. In curriculum evaluation, participant observation enables the researcher to determine whether people are processing information or reacting to a curricular innovation in the manner intended.¹³

⁹ Robert B. Edgerton and L. L. Langness, Methods and Styles in the Study of Culture (San Francisco: Chandler and Sharp Publishers, Inc. , 1974), 31.

¹⁰ Judith Preissle Goetz and Margarte Diane LeCompte, 109.

¹¹ James P. Spradley, 58.

¹² Edgerton and Langness, 2.

¹³ Goetz and LeCompte, 110.

This study's engagement by the researcher began in October of 1995 with the recruitment of research consultants and context associates as prescribed by the Doctor of Ministry degree program of United Theological Seminary (see appendixes E). Each individual was solicited personally to serve in the capacity of consultant to the research and participant in the research. Each was explained the initial vision and passion of the researcher for entering United Theological Seminary's special doctor of ministry group of New Wine Fellows along with his initial perception for a research project. The researcher then arranged scheduled meeting with context associates as well as opportunities to meet with each person individually.

Phase I: Analysis and Phase II: Foundation of United Theological Seminary Doctoral of Ministry program description were shared with each person in the form of a synergy paper describing the researcher's autobiographical faith journey, context of ministry and a historical and theological foundation justifying the reason for investigating the question "Is This New Wine?" It was explained that these two sources would form the theological framework for the doctor of ministry dissertation project as well as serve as a means of professional development. Consultants and Contextual Associates were then asked either in writing or phone conversations to respond to each document for areas of strengths and weaknesses and clarification where needed.

In April of 1996 the researcher responded to a new course requested by the dean of the seminary for the 1996-97 academic year. It was at that time that the

researcher conceived of the initial outline and description of *The City as Text* course as the primary framework for carrying out the objectives of the research design by engaging students in a contextual dialogue and systemic analysis with public policy experts, church leaders and grassroots residents to discern the surviving pedagogy and theology of the community as an attempt to document and bridge the gulf between the academy, the church, and the community. The next step was to design the course syllabus (see appendix B). A draft of the course design was then shared with the dean of the seminary and context associates for input before finalization.

In October of 1996 the researcher entered the candidacy review in Phase III: Ministry Model Design where upon the basic outline of the ministry model and methodology were approved for the doctoral ministry dissertation project. This phase included: 1) preliminary review and consultation with consultants and context associates by way of meetings and phone conversations; and 2) formal review of candidacy application with assigned mentors, consultant, UTS official and peer group member.

The Students

The official registration policy of New Brunswick Seminary for a constituted class is five students. A total of 18 persons constituted the class. Ten students matriculating in the Master of Divinity degree program registered officially for *The City as Text* course. One student audited the course for one credit needed for graduation. Eight members of Elmwood Presbyterian Church

were also considered to make up the students of the class. All of those participating in the course were considered adult-learners since on average, the age of the class was estimated to be over 40 years. These adult-learners came to class after working a full day. The class had an equal number of women and men. All were of African descent except for one Korean American. Among New Brunswick students 4 were women and 6 were men. Among members of Elmwood 3 were women and 5 were men.

New Brunswick student's academic performance was measured on a required journal assignment and final paper that called for identifying an urban issue emerging from the class and utilizing one land-use principle and one urban ministry principle to serve as a paradigm of church and community revitalization. They were encouraged to use them based on an unapologetic Christian perspective to develop core themes for curriculum development to be used by the church and the community.

The criteria for the final paper were as follows:

- Identify one urban ministry principle and one land-use principle and illustrate how they are related to urban theological education as designed in the course *The City as Text*.
- Present the theme that will serve as the curriculum principle thrust of your project.
- Identify the purpose for selecting the particular approach you have suggested.

- What objective(s) are projected or intended to be accomplished?
- What people or group are most likely to benefit?
- What kind of preparation is required of leaders who engage in such a ministry?
- What kind of education is necessary for the congregation?
- Propose a reflection/action engagement.

The final step in the process of framing the research involved recruiting public policy experts and church leaders from Elmwood Presbyterian Church of East Orange, New Jersey, and gaining permission to conduct the course in the neighborhood center as the classroom from the President of Harabee Community Economic Development Initiative Inc. Gaining understanding of both Elmwood's setting where their ministry model implementation took place and the perspective of the members who interacted within that setting along with students from the seminary, public policy-makers and administrators and residents working and living in the area were necessary for gathering contextually rich, in-depth data essential for developing an urban theological education curriculum beneficial to the academy, the church, and the community. Therefore, it was important to design and organize a course that would provide a systemic analysis of the community in its broadest context.

The Class

Eight classes in one of the seven land-use paradigms, i.e., Economic Empowerment, Politics and Government, Health Care, Education, Social Service,

Physical and Technology framed the discussion. Prior to engaging in dialogue with the church and the community two sessions were held on campus with students to introduce them to the course objective and requirements, and to frame the urban ministry principles and underlining premise of the ethnographic research method.

These two sessions were considered essential by the researcher to clarify the research goal framed by the larger question “Is This New Wine?” Each student was given a copy of the Is This New Wine? Paper as required reading. The paper along with a modified version of the course syllabus were also provided to each representative from Elmwood. Secondly, it was crucial that at the first gathering of students and church members that the Afrocentric paradigm be framed properly. Kamau T. wa-Kenyatta, a Ph.D. candidate of Temple University’s African American Studies department and adjunct professor of New Brunswick provided the Afrocentric framework for discussion and analysis.

The class met on Mondays from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. beginning with a light meal, followed by a 45-minute to an hour presentation with questions and answers from an East Orange policy-maker in one of the seven land-use area. Each session was then divided into discussion groups to discern the crux of the issue for the academy, the church and the community, and to give articulation to how God is perceived and talked about or not talked about in the community. The art of active listening was highly prized and emphasized throughout the process.

Research Sites

The context of ministry is described in three distinct yet defined areas: 1) New Brunswick Theological Seminary, 2) Northern and Central New Jersey, and 3) The Presbyterian Church (USA). Each of these is given full consideration because of its contribution to the composite of the research.

New Brunswick Seminary

A major consideration of the research undoubtedly included the role of New Brunswick Seminary in the advancement of urban ministry as a valid field of theological inquiry in the current debate of the “*excellence*” of theological education. This debate in theological circles, the crisis of urban America, the decline of mainline urban congregations, the apathy among Black Presbyterians, and the controversy of Afrocentrism as an alternative to urban revitalization in African American communities (as documented in the “Is This New Wine?” Paper) are all circumscribed in what constitutes the context of this critical study.

In August of 1991, the researcher accepted the position of Assistant Professor of Metro-Urban Ministry at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey. “On the verge of entering its third century and founded in 1784 to train ministers for the congregations of the Reformed Church in America, New Brunswick Theological Seminary today continues to serve its original purpose while also training leaders for more than twenty other denominations.”¹⁴

¹⁴ New Brunswick Theological Seminary Catalog 1992-93, 6.

The seminary was first located in Manhattan, but moved to New Brunswick in 1810. In New Brunswick the Seminary shared a campus with Rutgers College, an institution started by the Reformed Dutch Church in 1766. The Seminary then moved to its present campus in 1865 and continues to enjoy close relationship with the University, including cross-registration and shared degree programs in School of Social Work and Library and Information Science.

Since its beginning in 1784, the mission of New Brunswick Theological Seminary has been to prepare persons for educated and faithful leadership in the church and world. Originally, this mission served primarily young, white males who intended to be ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church. Over time, the mission was broadened to include men and women from many different denominations, racial and ethnic groups.

Howard G. Hageman, the 17th president, chronicles the history of New Brunswick in the following way:

During the seventies and early eighties New Brunswick Seminary took a bold step to carry out its historic mission in theological education. Beginning with the appointment of Dr. Howard Hageman as president, the seminary began creating a new identity and focus. The result was the inauguration of the urban program. Looking to the greater metropolitan area, the school stepped forward to serve new students from racial and other cultural backgrounds from many denominations, along with its traditional RCA constituency.¹⁵

¹⁵ Howard G. Hageman, Two Centuries Plus (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 192.

The seminary is still experiencing a transition from a culturally exclusive past to a culturally inclusive future. In a 1993 report of the Board of Trustees the seminary is described in the following manner:

The multicultural character of a student body of two hundred and six suggests that the seminary is committed to an inclusive model of theological education. These students represent a broad spectrum of social economic backgrounds, and range in age from the twenties to the sixties. The make up of the regular faculty and administrators includes three African- American males, two European-American females, one Korean-American male, and nine European-American males.¹⁶

This presence of a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic student body and faculty helps to generate a global setting in what Kelsey calls the second requirement of theological education of practical theologians: “That is, it must generate a well informed and highly self-conscious and “global consciousness” in students.”¹⁷ Such a context serves to enable students to become practical Christian thinkers. In describing itself in the catalog it states: NBTS student body reflects the rich diversity of God’s whole people.

Almost 60% of the students are African-, Hispanic- or Asian-American. Almost half of all students are women. These students come to seminary from all sorts of careers and bring with them a richness of experience in faith and life. Our innovative curriculum provides the context in which all this diversity of ethnicity, culture, denominations, and experience can be expressed in a single conversation—an educative process which values each person’s calling and gifts. The result is an unparalleled educational opportunity for the women and men who will lead the church in an increasingly complex and pluralistic context.¹⁸

¹⁶ New Brunswick Theological Seminary Board of trustee Report; April 23-24, 1993, 2.

¹⁷ Kelsey, , 167.

¹⁸ New Brunswick Theological Seminary Catalog, 1997-1998, 5.

The newly commissioned stated mission of the seminary in 1997

reads thus:

“New Brunswick Theological Seminary is a teaching institution of the Reformed Church in America called by God to be a servant of the whole church of Jesus Christ. The Seminary’s mission is to continue the ministry of Jesus in our time and place by enabling persons to translate their calling and gifts into faithful Christian ministry”.¹⁹

Northern New Jersey and New York Metropolitan Area

What opportunities or threats exist external to New Brunswick Theological Seminary in its role of preparing urban church leaders? This is a crucial question to answer for this study. New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the United States. More than any other state, it contains poor and rich people, clean and contaminated areas, and other marked contrasts in close proximity because it is so urbanized. It is the second most affluent state in the nation. As one of the Middle-Atlantic states, New Jersey is already ethnically diverse, and is becoming more so.

The population of New Jersey between 1980 and 1990 grew by 5 percent, to 7.8 million, but the state’s minority population increased by over 30 percent. African Americans, Hispanics, Pacific Islanders, Indians, other Asians, West Indians, and a dozen other nationality and ethnic groups helped New Jersey to grow. African Americans, almost a million strong, comprised New Jersey’s largest minority group, but the 12 percent increase in their numbers during the 1980s was overshadowed by spectacular increase in other groups. The Hispanic population grew by a half, to 740,000. Proportionally, New Jerseyans’ Asian extraction were

¹⁹ Ibid. , 7.

the fastest-growing group, increasing by over 160 percent to about 273,000 in 1990".²⁰

The Hispanic American portion of the New Jersey's population is projected to equal the African American portion of the state's population in size by the year 2000. During the same period the European American population of New Jersey is projected to shrink by 1.8%.²¹

As might be expected this trend shows up in the life of the Church as well. According to the report of the 1994 New Brunswick Theological Seminary Strategic Planning Committee, there are indeed a lot of Protestant Christians in the cities of New Jersey, however, they are mostly poor and African American and Hispanic. These trends, the report goes on to state imply a threat for mainline Protestant denominations such as the Reform Church of America, the Presbyterian Church USA, and the United Methodist Church. The members of these denominations are mostly European American and middle class. Their congregations have traditionally been fairly homogenous in cultural and ethnic terms. The likely decline of these denominations and their congregation in New Jersey and New York is inevitable unless they become more truly inclusive. This situation paradoxically becomes an opportunity for NBTS. Thus, the seminary is placed in a unique situation to provide leadership in the area. New Brunswick Theological Seminary is in the unique position to reach out to the ethnic churches

²⁰ Barbara G. Salmore and Stephen A. Salmore, New Jersey Politics and Government: Suburban Politic Comes of Age (University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 5.

²¹ Summary Report of the Strategic Planning Process, January, 1994, 13, Report to the New Brunswick Seminary Board of Trustee, February, 19, 1994.

and grassroots communities of the region. The report highlights another glaring opportunity in relations to these population trends:

New Jersey and New York City are becoming increasingly “balkanized” along ethnic lines. This is due in part to the high degree of residential segregation in New Jersey, indicated by the fact that 90% of the state’s children who are members of racial/ethnic minorities live in 19 of the states’ 625 school districts. This is also partly due to the role of New York and New Jersey as ports of entry for immigrants from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. NBTS, with its diverse student body and its emphasis on denominational formation in the midst of ecumenical conversations, is uniquely placed to provide leaders for a church that would claim this mission opportunity.²²

The Research Setting

The primary location of this ethnographic study is limited to the city of East Orange, New Jersey where the Harambee Community Economic Development Initiative of Elmwood Presbyterian Church is located. Description, discussion, and analysis of the city had to be extensive for several reasons. First, one of the major objectives addressed by this research challenged the traditional classroom approach by placing the locus of urban theological education contextually. Detailed descriptions of the research setting provided data for systemic analysis of the required inquiry into how the various systems link together in the community. Second, the physical structure and location of Harambee promoted the culture of learning, and served as the bridge between the academy and the church. Third, the researcher’s belief about the locus of the community’s theology and pedagogy was a significant contribution of the students’ learning paradigm of urban theological education. These beliefs were transmitted to the students and played a

²² Ibid. , 14.

major role in their development of perspectives about urban ministry. In turn, the students adoption of these beliefs and values provided them with rationales that they used in their required assignment to make use of the seven land-use principles and the three principles of urban ministry (empowerment, collaboration, and transformation) to develop core themes for curriculum development to be used by the church and community.

The Community

Founded in March of 1863 as a separate municipality by the State Senate in Trenton,²³ East Orange situated within a 3.95 square mile radius (see map in appendices), is a densely populated city of 85,000 people. Much of its housing stock and commercial buildings are old. According to the 1990 US Census Report, an estimated 51.8% of its housing was built prior to 1950. The city's 1990 population was 73,552, down from 77,690 in 1980. However, in 1995 the population is estimated to be closer to 85,000. African-Americans comprise 90% of the population. East Orange has a high rate of poverty, a high rate of children supported by Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), a low percentage of college graduates, and a low rate of high school graduation. East Orange is the second largest city in Essex County, but is the leader in negative indices of poverty and distress. Some of the indices are as follows:

- East Orange ranks fifth among New Jersey cities in the number of reported HIV/AIDS cases;

²³ Mark A. Stuart and Jessie W. Boutillier, A Centennial History of East Orange (Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 64-24093: East Orange Centennial Committee, 1964), 1.

- Its infant mortality rate is 59% higher than the state average of 9.3 per 1,000;
- Its birth to teens rate is 81% higher than the state average of 3 per 1,000;
- Its teens death rate is 57% higher than the state average of 7 per 1,000;
- 92% of all single parent households are female headed.

Since 1990, the unemployment rate has climbed steadily from 7.2% to a rate of 11%. There are few employment opportunities within the city. Of a civilian labor force of 33,853, only 17% (6,000) work in East Orange.

The local school district shows a dramatic increase in the number of students dropping out of school. The dropouts were most pronounced in grades nine, ten, and twelve. Of the total population, 43% left schools for reasons unknown or because they were dissatisfied with the school. At the elementary school level classrooms are very overcrowded. The buildings often lack adequate space and equipment, which makes it difficult to meet the needs of the students.

Over 50% of the city's household are considered low income according to the census figures. However, the children and young adults are affected more dramatically by poverty: 27% of all children and young adults (17 years of age or younger), live below the City's poverty level. Finding quality and affordable day care is a major problem.²⁴

²⁴ This source was compiled from 1990 census data and a booklet from East Orange city hall labeled: Community Development C D-2000 submitted by Harambee Community Development Initiative to the Department of Health and Human Services.

The Church

Elmwood Presbyterian Church of East Orange was selected for several reasons: 1) its pastor had participated in the initial conception of the Is This New Wine? Paper as a member of the African American Advisory Committee of the Presbyterian Church (USA); 2) it is one of the fastest growing African American Presbyterian congregations in the Presbyterian Church (USA); 3) its location is accessible for students who commute from New York and Central New Jersey; and 4) it is engaged in community economic development through the Harambee Community Economic Initiative.

Harambee Community Development Initiative, Inc. was established in June 1994 and, therefore, has a very limited track record. However, the corporation has received a significant equity injection by its principal incorporator, the Elmwood Presbyterian Church. The church has provided over \$500,000 to acquire and renovate a three story 21,000 sq. ft. office building which is used to house various social services and economic development programs for the residents of East Orange and its surrounding communities.

Because most traditional urban research excludes the church and because traditional education research tends to focus on the dynamics of the classroom in large group instruction of traditional theological education as subject matter, this study employed a non-traditional approach making use of the community as the classroom. Harambee Community Development Initiative Inc., a community outreach of the Elmwood Presbyterian Church, provided an appropriate site for

conducting the class *The City as Text*. The researcher secured the site by contacting the President of Harambee, who is also a context associate for the study, to request permission to conduct the class. The researcher also received written permission from the Elmwood members and community grassroots persons by means of a Consent to Participate form (see appendix C) that further explained the nature of the course and study, emphasized that their participation was voluntary, that the data will be collected by video observation and interviews and stated that they may withdraw at any time.

The research, however, was severely challenged by the availability of grassroots persons of the Elmwood/Harambee communities to attend the regularly scheduled session. As a result, in order to maintain the integrity of the research, a secondary design was employed by collecting ethnographic anecdotes from grassroots persons attending Elijah's Promise soup kitchen in New Brunswick via video tape. The results of the taped interviews were transcribed by a stenographer and are inserted into the results of the study.

Presbyterian Church (USA)

The Presbyterian Church USA, increasingly, is becoming a racially and culturally plural denomination. Even though the present estimates in the denomination are about ninety-five percent white in a society with a steadily increasing proportion of people of color. Africans, African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans constitute this growing segment. Even though other racial group have a long history in the Presbyterian Church, African-

Americans traced their beginning with First African Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia in 1807.

In a 1990 statistical analysis, contributed by Lillian Anthony and Majorie Ward, they reported “virtually all of the 11,500 congregations processed through the Office of the General Assembly indicated that there were nearly 137,000 racial/ethnic members of the Presbyterian Church (USA), divided in this way: Black, 68,465; Asian, 38,829; Hispanic, 22,931; and Native American, 6,742”.²⁵ It is fair to say, since the majority of the membership in the Presbyterian Church (USA) is White and non-urban, many of the complexities of the urban life are foreign to most of its constituent members.

In November 1991, the African American Advisory Committee of the Presbyterian Church (USA) adopted the following as its’ stated mission:

As Africans, and African-Americans, we exist in the Presbyterian Church (USA) to further advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ from an Afrocentric worldview that includes the liberation of African, and African American history, culture, and spirituality; and that seeks to be faithful to the reform tradition by promoting multicultural infusion curricula in the ministry units of the denomination; and that seeks to empower African American clergy, congregations, and lay persons to bear witness to the resurrection power of Jesus Christ both within the denomination and beyond the denomination.²⁶

In response to the urban crisis of Los Angeles and actions of the 204th General Assembly (1992), the Urban Ministry Strategy Task Force was

²⁵ Lillian Anthony and Majorie Ward, “Decoding Through Statistics,” ed. (Church and Society Magazine Presbyterian Church USA September/ October, 1991), 89.

²⁶ Presbyterian Church USA, African American Advisory Committees Minutes, November, 1992.

established by the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit to respond to the fact that many of the denomination's urban congregations were struggling to survive or were closing their doors. The urban strategy approved by the (207th) General Assembly 1995 called for a paradigm shift in the way it does urban ministry and the way it thinks and teaches urban ministry. Seminaries were called upon to play a major role in shaping the discussion of urban ministry, and participating in the revitalization of both the church and the community.

One practical dimension that needs acknowledgment is that African American Presbyterian churches are predominantly urban (and those which have been historically rural are becoming increasingly urban in nature); institutionalized; partially indigenous, ethnic in outlook and worldview; second and third generation; and are marginalized within a multi-ethnic church.²⁷

Research Methods

The primary means of data collection was intensive community observation via walking and driving through the neighborhoods, video taping and interviews—an ethnographic approach. A total of 28 hours of video taping was done. Twenty-four hours of taping took place in *The City as Text* course over eight weeks and four hours of ethnographic interviews with grassroots persons in three days.

Ethnographic research is interactive and spontaneous requiring the researcher to be adaptive as he or she engages persons in the interview process.

²⁷ Marsha S. Haney, Missiolog ical Reflections On The Ministry and Work of The African American Advisory Committee (an unpublished report).

The reader will note that the questions asked in the data collection and interview section in each case changed primarily due to the dynamics of the engagement. The researcher, however, stayed as close to the original pre-designed questions as possible.

The research method is a search for an curriculum approach to urban theological education through the narrative of faith and resistance among grassroots persons. “Moreover,” says Stewart, “the narrative form also preserves the dialogical elements of indigenous discourse, because there are myriad subtleties and peculiar inflections of meaning and feeling unique to black life and culture that resist full disclosure by abstract and analytical constructs”.²⁸ The story of one’s “God encounter” allows the storyteller to speak of God in ways which preserve the structural integrity of the dialogical experience”.²⁹

Further:

Ideas of God and their dissemination in the narrative form not only emerge from a cultural and a “lived” context, but they preserve the dynamics, spontaneous, and amorphous elements of indigenous thought. The context of lived experience in African American life and culture is thus transformed into the sacred text of theological construction.³⁰

The Sample

In addition to conducting the class *The City as Text* and the day-to-day observation and contact with the African American community, a total of 9 persons were interviewed intensively during the time that persons attended the

²⁸ Stewart, 3.

²⁹ Ibid., 3.

³⁰ Ibid., 4.

soup kitchen or meals or for training. The sampling criteria included the following elements:

1. Only persons of African American descent were asked to participate in the interview.
2. Only persons who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study were selected.
3. All persons available to be interviewed at noon time when either they were present for meals or for classes for job training.
4. All persons available for the interview were identified and recommended by the director of the job training program.

Data Collection

The researcher requested the permission of the Director of “Elijah’s Promise, Promises Jobs” program to conduct interviews with persons attending the program either for meals or for job training. Because of the Director’s busy work schedule and the very critical nature of managing soup kitchen several weeks occurred before a calendar date was confirmed. The researcher was familiar with such routine since he had visited the soup kitchen on a regular basis for meetings and as a meal server over the course of three years, so it was fairly easy to obtain permission to conduct the research. On a few occasions the researcher arrived at the soup kitchen and was unable to conduct his interviews because the Director was called away on emergency. Data collection was finally conducted in three days, beginning in August of 1997 by interviewing nine of the major informants.

The setting for the interviews was in two locations. The first day was held in a small but convenient storage room near the dining hall for easy access of persons making themselves available while working. On the second and third days a large classroom that doubled as a meeting area was use so as to be near the training classes of the jobs program. Tables were arranged to present a panel presentation by participants. During the interview process, the researcher invited persons into the room and in doing so attempted to gain a rapport by creating a climate of trust and hospitality through informal conversation. After formal introductions, the next step was to contract with the interviewee about the expectation of the interview, gaining their consent in writing to use their response as part of the research. The way that trust was established by the researcher was by stressing the anonymity of the interview process and some of his background growing up in Cincinnati and by using informal language and nuance familiar in Black culture .

The interviews were conducted once persons had completed their lunch, and in some cases in between classes with the permission of the instructor. Every attempt was made not to disrupt the routine of the program. After the purpose and goals of the study were reviewed with participants, consent forms were signed granting permission to conduct the interview. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were thanked for participating in the study and it should be noted that only one person refused to participate. This is of importance and needs

to be noted at this time since many of the persons interviewed were asked on short notice.

All interviews were video taped and after the interviews was conducted the researcher immediately scheduled time to replay them for clarity of transmission, so that if the researcher had questions regarding the transmission, the interviewee would be approached on the same day or the next and asked to verify any information that had to be obtained.

The researcher originally planned a highly structured observation/interview strategy that revolved over several weeks of intensive observation separated by periods of less intensive study. This scheduled proved impossible to implement for one major reasons. Namely, irregularity of participants attendants to the soup kitchen prohibited such as approach. The hours meals were served coincided with planned periods of intensive engagement, and the method of data collection and analysis prohibited such a formal schedule.

Ethical Consideration

Throughout the interviews, the researcher emphasized with all parties that requisite ethical standards would be maintained. These standards included guaranteeing anonymity to all informants and institutions, clearly communicating the objectives of the research to all informants, being constantly alert to and respecting the privacy needs and sensitivities of all informants, and constantly displaying behaviors that reinforced the researcher's role as a person who was trying to understand, not judge. Throughout the study, the researcher referred to

himself as a professor of a seminary and not as a researcher. Such a reference granted the researcher respect and authority in the view of the participant with a sense of black pride in knowing that the information shared would be guarded with care and sensitivity.

Field Notes

Field notes are the brick and mortar of an ethnographic structure.³¹ The researcher consciousness of the importance of keeping a record of the field experience maintained a written account of the actual engagement. Note taking primarily took place after the interview process either in his car, on a park bench, in his office or at home. The process supported the action/reflection learning of the researcher. “Researchers, says Goetz and LeCompte, take part in the daily activities of people, reconstructing their interactions and activities in field notes taken on the spot or as soon as possible after their occurrence.”³² Included in the field notes are interpretive comments based on researcher perceptions; these are affected by the social role taken by the researcher within the group and by the way people react as a consequence of that social role.³³

Data Analysis and Findings

The following provides the reader with a narrative of the faith and resistance of grassroots persons in their own words. Participant # 1 from

³¹ David M. Fetterman, Ethnography: Step by Step (Newbury Park, CA.: Sage Publication, 1989), 107.

³² Goetz and LeCompte, 109.

³³ Ibid.

Barbados is a worker in the soup kitchen shared her faith in God' providence after being put out of her mother's home:

Now, he's [speaking of God] helped me. Lots of time I pray. I ask God for answers and he helped when I need him. When my mom put me out, prayer helped me find a place. Two weeks later, I had me a place. I feel that was the Lord's work. . . . See, I was praying, and asking God to help me find a job. I had been out job hunting. So far, you know, no place has called me back. But, I am going to keep on calling those places. Like, I can do cashier. I went to school for nursing. I used to work at Bay House. I know, like, how to work on the line. I was a manager at Mac Donald's for four years. I worked at Wal-Mart. I used to work in a school building. I have a certificate. I have lots of little trades. This year is just a little difficult. I have four kids to support. I get \$6.00 a day. I will keep asking the Lord to help me.

Participant #2 shared how her faith in God helped to shape and support her in difficult times after being out of work for two and half years:

By me having faith in God he has brought me a long way within the last three years. Yes, because I was out of work for two and a half years. I worked at Maiden Form for ten years. It is located in Edison. But, they moved to North Carolina. I was out of work. And I had to get on assistance. I am married, but I am separated. My husband is addicted to drugs. So, it is like everything was on me. And God took me through about being on assistance. Took me through that year. First, I was on unemployment. He took me through as far as paying the bills as a single parent by myself. I have one daughter. She is eighteen. At that time she was like seventeen. She was a teenager. He provided for me. You know, shelter and food for both of us as a single parent. Then after my unemployment ran out I had to go on assistance. I was on assistance for a year. And I went through training and then I had to volunteer my service at Elijah Promise. There is a system now called SeeWay, where you have to work for your check. I had to do nine months down in Elijah Promise in order to get a check every month. That is how God blessed me with this job of kitchen coordinator. By me volunteering my services here. . . . I said I have faith in God. He has brought me this far, as you know, I was struggling. You know, with unemployment and on assistance. But, you know, I kept the faith and kept praying. And he blessed me with two part time jobs.

The interview continued as it focused on her church affiliation as she talked about where she see God working in the community:

Yes I am a church person. Just, I don't go to church. Now, I have to work here on Saturday and Sunday. Before that, I used to go to church every Sunday. Yes, I am a Baptist! . . . but I strayed away when I was eighteen years old.

Q. Can you talk about where you see God actively working in the Community?

Yeah, I see him working here because this place has not always been here. So, I see him working in a place where people can come and eat. You know, as far as the homeless. And we also have counseling programs here also. I see him working in this area in Elijah Promise where people can come and get a meal and relax. Also, we help them out with jobs. I see him working in this area also.

Q. When you hear the phrase the Good News, what does that mean to you?

It means it is- Okay, I will be honest I don't read the Bible because I don't really understand it. I used to go to Bible study so I can get a better understanding of it. It is like I just-you know, in my mind I know as a Christian you are not supposed to let burdens get you down and stuff. At times, I was burden out a lot. So, I would read the Bible. I got some understanding. And other times I really didn't understand it. I am just saying in my opinion. I think it would be good news of God. Good News that you see in the church, yourself, that God seem to bless you with.

When asked to name some of the lessons remembered growing up in the community? She responded:

I learned I wish I would have stayed in school and get my education and further my education, which I didn't do. So, I wish I would have did that. That is what I am trying to teach my daughter. I thought other things were more important than my education. I try to teach her to get her education. Just worry about the other things later on in life. Right now, it is education. . . . Also, I mean to say stay in the church. If you can, stay in church.

Because the street life-that is all about violence. Stuff like that. Stay out of the street and stay in church. You know, you don't want to work with violence and stuff. In the street life that is all it is, violence and crime. And drugs, you know. Just bad habits.

When asked what keeps you from being influenced by the negative elements of the community and what strengthens you? She responded:

Well, it is like certain people you hang around. Gangs will influence you. If you are not strong, if you are a weak person, you fall right into the trap. And my husband is not. He used to go to church and stuff with me. And he just got with the wrong crowd of people. He wasn't strong. He just fell into that trap. And now he is just out there. And it is just like me. It is like when I was going through a stressful period. I used to have friends say come on let's go out. I didn't think that would solve my problem going out and drinking and stuff like that. You do these things and you still got the same problem. So, I mean, I wasn't - you know I was influenced to do it. But, again, I was strong enough not to do it. So, it is like you just have to be strong on your own part. Not let everybody influence you in doing something.

Participant # 3 shared her understanding of Christianity and the church's efforts to address demonic forces in society.

The society, a lot of people don't want to hear about the church. And with church folks themselves you got to be careful. They can't be approaching people, everyone. I think Christianity has been taken lightly. I am not saying that everybody calling themselves Christians are not Christ like. That is when speaking of people about Christ we got to know Christ is in it. People do not believe in spirits. Demons are out there. As you believe in the spirit, demons are out there. You need to be talking to somebody. I know people don't like to think of someone having demons in them, but, you are talking about drugs. You are talking about homosexuality. All of these are demons. They are possessions. So, you have to be prepared before you go out there and grab someone and say I am going to introduce them to Christ.

How do we get prepared and who prepares us?

First, you accept Christ in your life. You have to know you are saved. I am not guided by the night. I am saved doing everything in the Word. It has to be a separation. I know there are people in life who look at me and can tell I am saved without me ever mentioning the church. They look at me. After you have accepted Christ you have to stay in the Word. Not only stay in the Word, you have to change your thoughts. Christ will talk to you. Some people don't think he talks. He will talk to you. He will lead you. He will guide you. He will show you the way and the walk. You won't drink. He will tell you if you are in the right place. Most people know they are not Christ like. It is out of ignorance. Out of denial. They aren't doing the right thing.

When asked to comment on the crisis experienced in the African American community in terms of unemployment, teenage pregnancy, poor school, gangs and drugs, etc. She offered the following response:

You are asking how do you talk to somebody who is hurting? Well, I can only talk about my experience. And if you are truly saved, when you feel low spirited and your soul is burdened you talk to him and he shows examples. You may be feeling this hurt. You don't know what he going to do until you've been there. God is in the spiritual realm. You can talk to him. If you are really sincere, they are going to Christ. They are going to Church. And it is not going to be easy. It is not going to happen overnight. Things in life—I have been saved for five years. Things in my life are still going on. However, a lot of people coming to Christ, okay . . . , you are going to have to reach out to them. It may be, but it is not going to happen overnight.

In a second day of interviews, a 29 year old African American male describes how God played a role in his life growing up in the neighborhood and where he is today:

Number one, I became a product of my environment. It was commonplace to see dead bodies around me in the hallway coming down the stairs. And selling drugs. Just that lifestyle. And it became a part of me. Me, myself, personally, I have been through a lot and done a lot in my lifetime. And I thank God for helping me stay on this earth. And He brought me to the point where today I have a college degree in business management. . . . I am going to culinary school. My family has a business. I just see my life in a

different aspect today. I know me, personally, I didn't really love myself. And I love myself for what I am. It's made me a better man. That is from all the help of God in my life. I know God is part of my life.

Another 30 year old male talks about his growing up without a father:

I didn't have a father in my home. And I grew up without a problem. To me, I am doing good. I have two sisters and brother who grew up with a father. My father I just found out about last year. Basically, I was raised by myself, my mother and great grandmother. If I did something wrong and my mother and grandmother and great grandmother couldn't do anything about it my uncle knocked me in the head. I got a cousin. I call him Christy. My cousin is in jail. He's been in and out of jail since six years old. My mother would say you are going to be like your cousin. She was saying that to me. That kicked in. Now, I can't get in trouble.

The chief instructor of Elijah Promise culinary jobs training program tells the story of her involvement in drugs and being homeless before seeking recovery.

I was a crack user. My habit was smoking \$1,000 of crack a day. Never missing a day for, like, five years. . . . I had a baby. Lost babies. I lived on the street. I was abused so bad, I had a nose broken, collar bone dislocated. I had been to maybe fifteen different rehabs, and over seventy-five detoxs. And no one wanted me. I had to do this on my own. I believed my mom instilled in me a prayer. Somehow, I don't know. I believe these changes I needed to go through, had to go through, sort of helped me build a new character I am proud of. I learned about people. I remember seeing Oprah Winfrey on TV when she talked how she succeeded. I just happened to see this show talking about getting on her knees and praying. It was the first prayer she'd gotten. "Now I lay me down to sleep." She does that up to now no matter what. And I remember going into the bathroom saying, Lord, if you get me out of this, I will just serve you. It was like I completely surrendered and I looked in the mirror. I started saying a prayer that my mom had given me. Often, I say these basic prayers. And the Lord let me live for others I might live like thee. I would say the same prayer four, five times a day. Every time I felt myself getting depressed or pulling my spirit I would say these

prayers and these prayers started something inside of me. Before I knew it, I was able to go outside. I had stopped using drugs. And I started to reach out and ask people about things I knew about life.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the procedures that were utilized in this study. This first section provided an explanation of the research design utilizing the ethnographic method. A detailed examination of the settings was provided to illustrate for the reader an understanding of the bridging institutions, the academy, the church, and the community leading toward an appropriate curriculum model for urban theological education. The means by which data was collected was outlined for future replication.

The final section described the field experience through interviews with grassroots persons sharing their understanding of God's self-revelation and God's self-disclosure in time of crisis. A significant aspect of this ethnographic experience was the hopeful expectation of those interviewed in spite of the daily crisis experienced in the African American community. The researcher is convinced that such a method is invaluable to the curriculum development of urban theological education.

Curriculum Model

Implementation

Based on the research results and the interest generated from the *City as Text* course the following Urban Theological Education program consisting of four courses is proposed for students, clergy, church members, and grassroots community persons in the metropolitan area of New York and New Jersey to improve their skills in urban community revitalization. The program is designed as an Urban Institute and Certificate Program that is interdisciplinary in scope. It will be administered by the Metro-Urban Ministry office of New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

The aim of the institute and certificate program is to blend theory and practice in workshop forums by bringing together the academy, the church, and community. Research and publication will be an essential component of the institute as a way of remaining current on the issues pertaining to ministry in the urban community. This would take the form of a newsletter and, when possible, journal publication.

The objective of the institute is two fold: 1) continuing education opportunity for clergy and lay members by conducting regional classes in the metropolitan area of New York and New Jersey; and 2) resource development through networking opportunities as models of community revitalization.

A distinguishing program feature is its location. Each class will be conducted in the urban context making use of local facilities. It will partner with agencies and institutions as prescribed by the institute and needs of the community. It will make use of teaching pastors and experts in the field as adjunct faculty to teach in the program. In this way, the community becomes the center of the curriculum and can be implemented in several locations at the same time.

Each location will have its own curricula advisory committee to review and make modification to the curriculum based on community circumstance. This provide the needed structural flexibility for a urban theological education program.

A weekend intensive on the campus of New Brunswick Theological Seminary each fall semester will serve as an introduction for participants in all localities. Here a distinguished African, or African American scholar and theologian along with urban policy practitioners from the greater metropolitan area will be invited to be the Samuel Dewitt Proctor/ Gardner C. Taylor lecture speaker on the African American religious experience or current urban policy issue.

The curriculum for the certificate program in urban theological education will include a lecture/workshop approach, group sessions, and case discussion. It will consist of four courses over two years on a semester basis meeting once a week for three hours for twelve weeks per course

The following courses are presented as examples of what the program might entail. They are not considered to be final but only as a primer for what could be when implemented in collaboration with the church and community.

First Course: Afrocentrism and Ministry In the City

Participants will gain an appreciation of Afrocentricity as a spiritual and pedagogical paradigm of community revitalization.

Second Course: Foundation of Urban Theological Education

Participants will examine theological and theoretical framework for the contextual urban ministry. Particular attention will be given to action/ reflection as an approach to investigating urban issues.

Third Course: Life's Lessons for urban ministry

Participants will share and examine biblical and core spiritual values deeply ingrained in the history and tradition of the community. Particular attention will be given to how stories serve as vehicles of empowerment and transformation.

Fourth Course: Community Action Leadership and Urban Transformation

This course is designed so participants will examine successful and unsuccessful models of social transformation and the leadership skills needed to improve the effectiveness of urban organizations, and prepare proposals for change in their local communities.

See enclosed matrix with course, topics and class hours.

Certificate Program - Summary

1998 -99 Fall Semester

Course (1 CU)

Course # 1

Afrocentricity and Ministry

Topics

- Afrocentricity as Spirituality
- Ancient Africa and the Biblical
- Afrocentricity and Traditional African Religion
- Early Afrocentric Heroes and Heroines.
- Afrocentricity as a Cultural Mandate
- Afrocentricity as Community Development
- Afrocentric and Family Ministry
- Afrocentricity and Youth Ministry
- Afrocentricity and Women's Ministry
- Afrocentricity and Men's Ministry

Certificate Unit for Afrocentricity and Ministry in the City
1998-99 Fall Semester

Syllabi

First Course: Afrocentricity and Ministry
Participants will focus on Afrocentricity as a spiritual and pedagogical paradigm of community revitalization.

Objectives

- To introduce the spiritual dimensions of the Afrocentric paradigm as a community forum for engaging in urban ministry
- To gain an appreciation of an African-centered approach to community revitalization

Texts:

Ampim, Manu. Toward Black Community Development: Moving Beyond The Limitations of The Lecture Model. Oakland CA.: Advancing The Research, 1996.

Akbar, Na'im. Chains and Images of Psychological Slavery. New Jersey: New Mind Production, 1984.

Asante, Molefi Kete. Afrocentricity. Trenton: African World Press, Inc. 1988.

Sanders, Cheryl J. ed. Intersection Living: The Womanism and Afrocentrism in Theology. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

1998-99 Spring Semester

Course (1CU)

Course # 2

Foundation of Urban Theological Education

Topics

- **USA Society and its Discontents:** The major USA social movements such as Civil Rights Movement, African Nationalism Movement, Women Rights Movement, Gay Rights Movement, and the role of government in fostering or restraining those struggles.
- **Critical Issues and Transformation:** The societal condition to be changed by identifying the forces that shape the community and the leverage points which may lead to social transformation.
- **Organizing Models:** Models of social transformation, including Saul Alinsky's community organizing model, The Action Training , models of (1960-1975),
- **Community Development Corporations:** Community development corporation models as instruments of urban transformation.
- **Alternative Funding:** The role of foundations, charitable organizations and governmental agencies as providers of funding for transformation projects.

Syllabus

Second Course: Foundation of Urban Theological Education
 Participants will examine core belief systems and theoretical framework for the contextual ministry. Action and reflection will frame the examination and dialogue.

Objectives:

- To explore the formative stages of core belief as a collective portrait of ministry
- To reflect upon the practice of urban ministry as a means to action

Texts:

Linthicum, Robert C.; City of God/ City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church. Zondervan Publishing, 1991.

Freire, Paulo; Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Kretzmann, John, McKnight, John L.; Building Communities from the Inside Out
 ACTA Publications, Chicago, IL, 60640, 1993.

Wilson, William J., When Work Disappears

1999-2000 Fall Semester

Course (1 C U)

Course # 3

Life Lesson for Urban Ministry

Topics

- Family Genealogy
- Faith Stories of the Community
- Biblical Role Models
- Early Role Models
- Faith Stories as Empowerment

Syllabus

Third Course: Life Lessons For Urban Ministry

Participants will share and examine biblical and core theological values deeply ingrained in the history and tradition of the community.

Objectives

- To explore through story-telling the formative stages of the core beliefs and values through action/reflection and their implications for ministry in urban settings.
- To construct a spiritual autobiographic portrait in order to gain a clear understanding of ones leadership contribution to ministry in urban settings.
- To construct a spiritual portrait of the community in order to gain a clear understanding of its teaching and spiritual capacity to define, sustain and transform itself.

Texts:

Wilberly, Edward, Recalling Our Own Stories: Spiritual Renewal for Religious Caregivers, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Wimberly, Ann, Soul Stories: African American Christian Education, Nashville: Abington Press, 1994.

Thurman, Howard, Deep River and The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death, Richmond, Ind., Friends United Press, 1975.

_____, Jesus and the Disinherited. Friends United Press, 1981.

Stewart, Carlyle F., Street Corner Theology, James C. Winton Publishing, 1996.

Spring Semester 1999-2000

Course # 4
Community Action Leadership and Urban Transformation
Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Leader's Community: The interplay an assessment of the leader in the community• Racial Barriers in the Community: The obstacles created by racism in the leader's community.• Political Empowerment: The voting patterns that create political disfranchisement.• Community Solidarity: The collaboration of common interest with existing political and social entities.• Leadership as Mission: The shift of emphasis on mission opportunities in the local neighborhood• Critical Issues in the Community: Identification of a societal condition to be address during the program.• Celebrating Diversity: The community's multiracial, and multicultural heritage.

Syllabus

Fourth Course: Community Action Leadership and Urban Transformation

This course frames the essential characteristics for urban church leadership. Participants will examine successful and unsuccessful models of social transformation and the leadership skills needed to improve the effectiveness of urban organizations, and prepare proposals for change in their local communities.

Objectives

- To explore through action/reflection local political systems and structures and their impact on the church and local neighborhood
- To identify learnings from engagements with public policy-makers and how such learning is applicable to the church and community
- To explore the attributes and contributions of a leader.

Texts:

Hawkins, Thomas R. The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership. Westminster/John Knox, 1997.

Weems, Lovett, Church Leadership Nashville: Abington Press, 1996.

Bruggeman, Walter . Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices In Exile. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

Certificate Program-Management and Administration

Student Qualification and Admission

- For students with college degree or experience the Certificate would be considered as a Continuous Education Units program.
- Students will be recruited by the Student Affairs Office and the Urban Ministry Office according to NBTS standard procedures and targeting NBTS religious and community-based organizations connections.

Instructors Qualifications

- Where and when possible a team teaching approach will be used to reflect the integration of theory and practice. Consultants and experts in particular subjects will be invited to teach.
- A faculty development program will be provided to strengthen the team-teaching experience.

Administrative Structure

- Academically house in the Urban Ministry Office and in coordination with the Continuing Education program.

Offerings

1. Course will be offered Tuesday Evenings from 6:20 PM to 10:00 PM.

Utilization of campus and off-campus facilities and resources

1. Utilization of Campus and Off-Campus facilities
2. As registered NBTS student they will be entitled to services available to other students.

3. Special arrangements could be made through Gardner Sage Library to utilize university or college libraries closer to the student.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Is the traditional classroom the appropriate location for teaching urban theological education? The findings in this study demonstrated an alternative approach to urban theological education that move beyond the monastic tradition of power and control invested in one person to a non-traditional approach that is on balance collaborative and empowering, and that respect the existing knowledge of the learner. It is clear that a non-traditional urban theological pedagogy is appropriate for addressing the urgent problems today in cities, particularly, in the urban grassroots communities than the traditional offerings.

Additionally, it is clear that the opportunities for more research in this area of urban theological education is tremendous and would contribute greatly to the bridging element of the academy, the church and the community. The curricula possibilities become boundless in terms of what academic institutions and churches can do collaboratively in contextualized urban ministry and mission. What is even more exciting is the imaginable change in the character of the church and community as each begins to reclaim the core pedagogical and spiritual values inherent in an African American culture and heritage.

The research maintained throughout the academy's primary work is to prepare future church leaders to guide the church in its reflection on appropriate practice of authentic urban ministry; and that reflection *on* the practice of ministry in urban settings is required as part of the curriculum. Hence, the education of

urban ministry is the joint task of the church and the academy. At some point, the academy must provide an opportunity for students to engage regularly in disciplined dialogue and reflection with persons practicing their faith in the urban setting about the systemic nature of their circumstance.

Learnings from the Research:

The research revealed that there is validity in responding to the question “Is This New Wine?” in terms of the claims made by the paper of the crisis facing the African American Presbyterian Church and African American community; and that urban theological education is an appropriate response to the marginalized efforts of the academy, and church to address the crisis. The objective was to see if inserted in the curriculum whether Afrocentrism would contributed to a wider analysis of the problem.

It makes known, if framed properly, that church leaders could engage in a mutual partnership and discussion of contextual theological education alongside seminary students and community persons. It is possible to design a course of study to bring together a variety of disciplines and resource persons foreign to theological education, i.e., health-care, state agencies, local school representative to engage in dialogue with students and church leaders about the meaning *of*, and ministry *in*, the city.

The research was most interested in tracing the African roots of an urban theology and pedagogy as a systematic critique of the struggle of Black and oppressed people. This, then, led to an examination of the effectiveness of the

Black Theology project for the last thirty years. This examination uncovered useful themes from African theology and Black theology framed in an Afrocentric paradigm that could be incorporated in urban theological education curricula for addressing the crisis in the Black community. Of particular importance was the revealed deep seated spiritual resource of Traditional African Religion as a central element in the discussion of the grassroots community to define hopeful outcomes in the face of crisis.

Findings and Challenges

In the course of this project the following challenges emerged for the researcher in accomplishing the learning objectives.

First, the research affirmed that a proper study of the Is This New Wine? document is a valuable instrument for assessing the strength and weaknesses of the African American Presbyterian Church and the grassroots community. This investigation pointed to the validation of a rich African, and African American religious tradition, history, and leadership that would not have occurred had it not been for the question implied in the document.

Secondly, the research acknowledged that there is enough resources and literature to substantiate a curricula history of urban theological education as a creditable discipline within the academy; and that there is a vibrant and vital theology and pedagogy in the African American grassroots community separate and apart from the theology and pedagogy of the academy and the church.

Thirdly, the research upholds the thesis that there can be a bridged relationship between the academy, the church, and the grassroots community in terms of sharing curricula and concerns related to theologically-based urban analysis and training for the purpose of community development. The engagement of community organizing techniques are essential, however, for any curriculum outside of the traditional theological educational approach. One must also learn to appreciate the struggles of students to step outside of the traditional classroom in attempting to bridge theory and practice as an Afrocentric framework of urban ministry.

Fourthly, the research revealed that a combination of Black theology and Traditional African Religious values incorporated in an Afrocentric framework can serve in recovering the core theological and pedagogical values of the Black community. This last finding underscores the primary thesis of the research.

The stories of faith and resistance shared by persons interviewed, contributed a renewed appreciation of their struggles and of God's self disclosure and self revelation in the life of the community outside of the church. The face-to-face contact and the stories shared, it is believed, enhanced the researcher's ability to teach urban ministry from a more informed experiential knowledge-base. It also provided a greater appreciation of inserting a qualitative method of learning in courses whereby, students are also encouraged to have similar experiences of personal transformation.

Finally, the ministry outcome in the form of curriculum must be marked by a vision for the city. As vital communities of faith are developed, they must run counter to so much of the culture that values structure over people and finally holds out little hope for urban centers or their people. Done well, urban ministry celebrates the possibilities that cities hold, while critically analyzing those systems that oppress, and works strategically with increased sophistication to bring transformation. Therefore, the changing dynamics of the urban context raises two challenges: 1) that ministry in cities becomes more effective and comprehensive and 2) that theological education adapt its considerable resources in order to become more relevant to the task of training leadership for that ministry, and that the role undertaken by academy be as partners of a leadership team working toward systemic transformation for an enhanced quality of urban life.

What has clearly emerged for the researcher, is a clearer recognition and conviction of a grassroots theology that can be traced to the teachings of Traditional African Religious values across the Atlantic European Slave Trade, through the brutality of an enslaved history up to the current socio-economic crisis facing African Americans. This theology of the grassroots has significant implications for teaching urban ministry, particularly, in an African American context. The researcher is convinced that a theology of the grassroots that is synthesized of Black Theology and Traditional African Religious values is crucial to advancing urban ministry and urban theological education.

Learning about the influences of African history and religion on Judeo-Christian formation also has curricula importance to a community that has lost much of its memory concerning the rich contribution of African heritage. Black theology, therefore, takes on a renewed sense of urgency as it embraces Traditional African Religion, and Womanist theology as a theology of praxis.

APPENDIX A

IS THIS NEW WINE?

IS THIS NEW WINE?

A paper for discussion among
African-American Presbyterians

presented by

PRESBYTERIANS

for

PRAYER, STUDY, AND ACTION

April, 1993

"No one uses a piece of new cloth to patch up an old coat, because the new patch will shrink and tear off some of the old cloth, making an even bigger hole. Nor does anyone pour new wine into used wineskins, because the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins will be ruined. Instead, new wine must be poured into fresh wineskins." -Jesus (Mark 2:21-22)

Contents:

Part I:	Challenge Faced by the Church.....	1
Part II:	The Call to Prayer, Study, and Action.....	6
Part III:	Reformed, Reforming, and the Challenge to be Transformed by an Afrocentric Perspective	8
Part IV:	The Half Century Anniversary of the African Presbyterian Church in America: A Vision	15
Part V:	Where to From Here: Conclusion and Recommendations	18
Notes		21

PRESBYTERIANS FOR PRAYER, STUDY, AND ACTION

April, 1993

Dear Christian Friends,

As we approach the 21st century, how will African-American Presbyterians create viable ministries in their respective communities? In light of the critical needs of the African-American community, several lay and clergy African-American Presbyterians have begun serious discussion concerning the best means to embrace a proclamation of the Gospel that can give birth to Afrocentric new church developments, evangelism, Christian education, and mission. We have chosen to call ourselves "**PRESBYTERIANS FOR PRAYER, STUDY, AND ACTION**" (PPSA) as we join together in **PRAYER** (for the guidance of the Holy Spirit concerning these matters), **STUDY** (of options that will assist in alleviating the negative situations now gripping our communities nationwide), and **ACTION** (to create Afrocentric ministries to uplift and liberate the oppressed).

"Is This New Wine?" suggests that African-American Presbyterians may need to consider the option of forming a whole new denomination in order to achieve a truly Afrocentric proclamation of the Gospel. Understandably, this option may not be endorsed by all African-American Presbyterians. It is hoped, nonetheless, that discussion of the need for more viable ministries by Black Presbyterians in African-American communities will not become the occasion for further factionalism among Black Presbyterians ourselves. At all costs, we must avoid "crabs-in-a-basket" style inner group behaviors while the common problem, the racism within the PCUSA and wider society, remains unaddressed and our children and communities continue to be alienated from the congregations that should be able to assist them. Analysis and debate concerning difficult realities (from which we Christians often shy away) can provide the genesis of new hope if dialogue takes place in an atmosphere of mutual love, trust, and respect.

This paper is presented to all African-American Presbyterians for consideration. This is not to suggest that we are unconcerned for the welfare of our sisters and brothers among other racial/ethnic groups, including our White sisters and brothers. We are also not unaware of the current crisis of spirit that is currently forcing the denomination to make drastic cuts of staff and programs that can only result in the further marginalization of African-American concerns. This focus on the African-American community merely reflects our realization that it is inappropriate for us to: (1) Attempt to suggest what others should do in their respective communities; and (2) Place denominational politics as a priority over the welfare of our own children and communities.

The aim of this paper is to challenge African-American congregations to action concerning the most viable way we, as Presbyterians, can most effectively address the urgent needs of the African-American community. Our aim is only to present this matter for the prayerful reflection and debate of all Sessions of predominately African-American congregations and their congregations. The goal is for "grass roots" African American Presbyterians in our congregations to deliberate this matter for themselves: God, alone, is Sovereign of conscience.

PRESBYTERIANS FOR PRAYER, STUDY, AND ACTION

We are grateful to Ronald Peters, Associate Professor of Urban Ministry at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, for the time and energy he has spent listening to our collective conversations in meetings and by phone as he has sought to collect and present our thoughts in a cohesive fashion. It is hoped that this dialogue will contribute to all Presbyterians being empowered to more faithful witness to the love of Jesus Christ in a way that is truly reflective of their own historical, ethnic, and cultural identity.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Presbyterians for Prayer, Study, and Action

(Concerning the Challenge of 21st Century Ministry:
an Afrocentric Proclamation of the Gospel)

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Cultural Diversity
Associate for Evangelism
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PART I: THE CHALLENGE FACED BY THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH

*Nobody knows de trouble I've seen; nobody knows but
Jesus. Nobody knows de trouble I've seen! Glory!
Hallelujah! -African American Spiritual.*

In the paper, "A Call to a National Dialogue," produced for the recent Kelly Miller Smith Institute on African American Church Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School (October, 1992), the challenge faced by the African American Church is clearly outlined as follows:

The African American Church is in crisis. At a time in history when we are about to enter a new millennium, the African American Church stands at the crossroads of decision. Its traditional role as the conservator of Black culture and the conscience of the Black community is at stake. It must choose either life or death, blessings or curses. Whatever choice it makes will determine whether or not we and our descendants will live as a redeemed and redeeming community in this land where God has befriended us.

The signs of the crisis we face today are unmistakable:

Witness-- the social and economic descent of more than a third of the Black population into a burgeoning and permanent underclass.

Witness-- the children of our impoverished, drug-infested neighborhoods coming to the point of birth, and yet dying in the womb of human possibility.

Witness-- the rate of incarceration of young Black males which has 23 percent of those aged 20 to 29 (almost one of every four) in prison, on bail, on probation or parole.

Witness-- the turning of thousands of our young people toward illegal drugs in a vain, hedonistic escape from reality, or an attempt to enter a degrading, criminal career.

2

IS THIS NEW WINE?

Witness-- the unprecedented assault on Black family life by urban violence, poverty, homelessness, and teenage pregnancy on one hand, and on the other, the demands of an upwardly mobile, materialistic lifestyle that is scornful of God and has no place for the church of Jesus Christ.

Witness-- the reversals in the public arena of hard won policies ensuring affirmative action for minorities and women.

Witness-- the rampant individualism, the loss of community, and the decline of the Black Church as an effective agent for justice and liberation among all poor and oppressed people. The list goes on. ¹

Unfortunately, the above information is common knowledge in our society. It is also, unfortunately, common knowledge that, overwhelmingly, Black Presbyterian Christians lack the ability to address themselves to this crisis in their communities. At a time when human suffering in urban areas where high percentages of African-Americans are found has dramatically increased, frequently Black Presbyterian congregations are experiencing dwindling numbers, decaying physical plants, and vacant pulpits with the result that many Presbyteries are closing more and more Black congregations and starting none. It has been noted that an upsurge in the initiation of new churches is reflected nationwide throughout the Presbyterian Church (USA) in every racial group, except among African-Americans. Indeed, while there are several examples of new church development, growth, and vitality

IS THIS NEW WINE?

3

regarding effective urban ministry among African-American churches in other denominations, the nationwide record of African American new church development within the Presbyterian Church (USA) over the past ten years has been effectively written off by the denomination.²

This is not to suggest that merely the initiation of new congregations is needed. Also needed are efforts that will enable existing African-American congregations to more effectively address critical issues of economic blight, educational, social, and political disenfranchisement of their parishioners. Many Black Presbyterian congregations, however, view themselves as being so "middle-class" in their orientations and imitative of what they view as proper "White Presbyterian" liturgy and ethos, that they do not relate effectively to other Blacks. Many Black Presbyterians expend so much time and energy perpetually trying to relate to the structures of White Presbyterians that they are unable to relate to their own heritage or to others within the African-American community, a characteristic Gayraud Wilmore (Black and Presbyterian, 1983) documented long ago:

Let us put the matter squarely. Some of us have been so anxious to prove to our white brothers and sisters that we too are Americans and that we too 'belong' that we have deprived them of the gifts God has given to us as a people.... We have been so busy learning how to be 'human beings in general' that we have

IS THIS NEW WINE?

paid little attention to the special qualities of Black humanity that we have to bring when we are true to our own history and traditions.³

Wilmore further suggests that this identity crisis among many Black Presbyterians has engulfed them in a situation of dual penalty wherein they are frequently not taken being seriously by their White Presbyterian sisters and brothers nor by members of the wider African-American community:

Black Presbyterians have been criticized by other Blacks for remaining in a predominantly white church where they were under the double jeopardy of having to fight both class consciousness and racism.⁴

Is it possible for African-American Presbyterians to reclaim, unapologetically, their cultural and spiritual African heritage? Is it possible for Black Presbyterian churches to truly reclaim what Wilmore⁵ described as the *five resources of the Black religious heritage* and suggested as the means to more effective relationship of Black Presbyterianism to the African American community? These five resources are defined by Wilmore as: (1) Personal and Group Freedom from White Control; (2) The Image of Africa as the Land of Origin; (3) The Will of God for Social Justice; (4) Creative Style and Artistry; and (5) Unity of Secular and Sacred (avoiding the Euro-American sharp and artificial divisions of reality)?

IS THIS NEW WINE?

5

In light of the challenge faced by the African-American community today, the Rev. Marsha Snulligan Haney has described the challenge faced by Black Presbyterians this way:

Because of our professed belief in the "one, holy, universal, apostolic church," we join committed Christians throughout the world (be they in Africa, Brazil, the Caribbean, or Australia) in asking key questions concerning discipleship and ministry...

1. What shape will our Christian obedience take?
2. What kind of theological reflection is appropriate to this obedience?
3. How do we (as African-American Christians) understand the command to follow Christ into the 21st century?⁶

"Is This New Wine?" is a challenge directed especially to Presbyterians of African descent. This challenge, however, is also issued to any and all persons (Presbyterian or not) who, regardless of ethnic or cultural considerations, are concerned with the welfare and future of African-American communities as part of their concern for the future of humankind. It is a challenge to take whatever steps as are necessary to empower Black Presbyterians toward a more clearly Afrocentric proclamation of the Gospel in the African-American community as the essential means of addressing the social and spiritual crisis in that community from a Christian perspective.

PART II: A CALL TO PRAYER, STUDY, AND ACTION CONCERNING
THE FORMATION OF AFRICAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES IN AMERICA

*Sing a new song to the Lord!
 Sing to the Lord, all the world!
 Sing to the Lord, and praise God!
 Proclaim every day the good news
 that God has saved us.*

-Psalm 96:1-2

As Moses was called to lead the people of God out of bondage into freedom and out of the wilderness into the promised land; and as the Ethiopian official was called to return to Africa and proclaim the Good News to his people; and, as John Gloucester and Lucy Craft Laney were called to address the unique needs of African peoples in America, we are called by God to acknowledge the Sovereignty of God in and over our lives and affirm dignity and respect for all humankind by the following:

WHEREAS, we are a communal people with a rich African heritage and background acknowledging the triune God and the imperative of justice and love as the prerequisites of real unity and peace; and

WHEREAS, we as persons of African descent and members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) for the last 185 years of laboring within its bounds, give thanks to this denomination for its attempts, at many points, to stress inclusion and to proclaim justice issues, we yet recognize that its behavior has been and continues to be inconsistent with its stated objectives; and

WHEREAS, the various governing bodies; ministry units, committees, and task forces of the denomination formed to address the constitutional aims of inclusion and justice have failed to do either adequately with regard to its sisters and brothers of color; and

WHEREAS, African-American membership in the Presbyterian Church (USA) has been dually penalized in that we are neither fully embraced within the denomination and, as a result, viewed with some skepticism by our sisters and brothers in the African-American community beyond the church; and

WHEREAS, African-American Presbyterians can no longer be held back by denominational structures of the Presbyterian Church (USA) which prevent our immediate and ongoing responsiveness to the pain, suffering, oppression, and hopelessness that characterizes the community inhabited by our African sisters and brothers worldwide;

PART III: REFORMED, REFORMING, AND THE CHALLENGE
TO BE TRANSFORMED BY AN AFROCENTRIC PERSPECTIVE

When the Israelites saw the king and his army marching against them, they were terrified and cried out to the Lord for help. They said to Moses, "Weren't there any graves in Egypt? Did you have to bring us out here in the desert to die? Look what you have done by bringing us out of Egypt!... Moses answered, "Don't be afraid! Stand your ground, and you will see what the Lord will do to save you today... The Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out for help? Tell the people to move forward. -from Exodus 14:10-15

Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God -what is good and is pleasing to God and is perfect. -Romans 12:2

While a very grave step, the formation of a new African Presbyterian Church in America would not be as radical a departure from the historical tradition of Black Presbyterianism in this country as it might appear to be, at first reading. Indeed, this is not the first time Black Presbyterians have considered such action.⁷ This movement, in essence, represents an evolution of the spirit of previous generations of Black Presbyterians to address the needs of the wider African-American community and to engage in "uplifting the race" not only spiritually, but also educationally, economically, socially, politically, and culturally. In this sense, an Afrocentric approach to worship, evangelism, Christian education, nurture, mission, and stewardship only implies a more focused and less racist approach to addressing the concerns of the African-American community.

IS THIS NEW WINE?

9

Why Black Christians or White Christians? What About "In Christ there is no East of West"?

Discussion of this topic, with any semblance of integrity, would carry us far afield of the aims of this paper. Yet, for many Presbyterians (whether Black, White, Native American, Hispanic, Korean or any other of the multitude included in God's mosaic called humanity), this issue surfaces as paramount prior to any serious consideration of the merits of Afrocentricity as an enabler of the Christian proclamation of the Gospel among African-Americans. Wilmore addressed this issue in his book, Black and Presbyterian:

Sometimes one hears the question: "What does the Bible have to do with a Black Christianity or a White Christianity?"...The word "Christian" appears only three times in the Bible (Acts 11:26; 26:28; and I Peter 4:16) and "Christianity" - with or without a modifier - never. It is a term used to describe the religion that developed around the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, long after he and those who knew him in the flesh had passed off the scene. When you and I use the term "Christianity" we are speaking... as sociologists of religion -that is to say, as persons interested in the belief systems, practices, and social structural aspects of this tradition....⁸

According to Wilmore (and many others including Cone, Felder, Grant, Mays, Roberts, Thurman, West, or Woodson) the reality of Black Christianity and the uniqueness of the Black historical, cultural, social, and theological frame of reference in distinction from the main of White reality in America hardly

needs elaboration here. In addressing the matter within the context of the Black Presbyterian Christian perspective, Wilmore writes:

To speak of a Black Christianity is simply to refer to a social and cultural fact of life. It just happens to be a fact that for the more than four hundred years of Black history in the New World, eighty-five to ninety percent of all Black Christians have worshiped with people of their own race in all-Black congregations. As we might expect, certain realities and characteristics of faith and life are attached to that simple fact. To recognize them and take them seriously in a discussion about the Christian religion is neither to condemn nor to commend it. ...Like it or not, there is such a thing as Black Christianity and it is neither unbiblical nor unchristian to acknowledge its existence.⁹

The Value of Afrocentrism

During this 500th anniversary of the Columbus event, there has been much discussion concerning its impact upon cultures outside of Europe. There is widespread agreement that one of the most harmful cultural effects of this era has been the distortion of history. It is in this area of historical and, therefore, cultural perspective that one of Afrocentrism's greatest contributions to Black Christianity can be made. Molefi Asante (one of the most prolific writers on Afrocentrism) defines the aims of an Afrocentric approach to reality this way:

My work has increasingly constituted a radical critique of the Eurocentric ideology that masquerades as a universal view in the

IS THIS NEW WINE?

11

fields of intercultural communication, rhetoric, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, education, anthropology, and history. Yet the critique is radical only in the sense that it suggests a turnabout, an alternative perspective on phenomena. It is about taking the globe and turning it over so that we see all the possibilities of a world where Africa, for example, is subject and not object. Such a posture is necessary and rewarding for Africans and Europeans. The inability to 'see' from several angles is perhaps the one common fallacy in provincial scholarship.¹⁰

Asante argues that when persons of African descent are able to perceive the world from an African-oriented center (as for Asians, an Asian-oriented center or Europeans, a European-oriented center) a new awareness or consciousness of one's own humanity is fully achieved.¹¹ This movement toward an Afrocentric consciousness enables persons of African descent to achieve, from within an African center, what Jesus talked about when he articulated the great commandments: first, love of God and second, love of neighbor as one love's self (Mark 12.31).

Afrocentrism and Black Presbyterians.

By their very historical definition and current expressions, African-American congregations in general and the Black Presbyterian congregations in particular are (in their best and most authentic expressions) informed by an Afrocentric perspective. While the term Afrocentric is relatively new, the historical reality of Black Christians, corporately and

individually, whose perspective of the Gospel message has been oriented within the context of the issues and needs of an African-centered world view is well documented. Numerous writers on the subject of the Black Church have affirmed this position from a variety of differing perspectives, including Cannon, Cone, Grant, Lincoln, Mays, Mitchell, Paris, Woodson, and Wilmore to mention a few. Specifically, the history of Black Presbyterianism that has been guided by what would now be considered as an Afrocentric world view, is also rich with examples (see Inez Parker's The Rise and Decline of the Program of Education for Black Presbyterians of the United Presbyterian Church 1865-1970; Periscope I, II, and III; Wilmore's Black and Presbyterian: the Heritage and the Hope; Wilson's Black Presbyterians in Ministry; and Black Presbyterians in History, Vol 51-52, among others).

One of the worst legacies chattel slavery has left to many African-Americans has been self-hatred. There is an old adage, well known within the African-American community, that betrays not only the values of society at large regarding Black people, but the internalized values of oppression and self-hatred among Blacks. The adage says: "If you're white, you're right; yellow, you're mellow; brown: stick around; but black, get back!" The internalization of this warped value system is supported by the systemic relegation of the concerns of Blacks and other non-Europeans to the periphery of conscious thought in western

IS THIS NEW WINE?

13

society while lifting up the cultural, aesthetic, and social values of Europe as central and portraying them as universal values. Christianity has figured prominently in this distortion of reality.

The White institutional church in America and many of its imitators among Black churches have been part and parcel of this deceptive misuse of the Christian Faith. The National Dialogue on "What It Means to be Black and Christian" has suggested that this misuse of Christianity must first be addressed by Black Christians, if they are to be able to truly address the needs of the broader African-American community:

It is not possible to be a Black Christian... without recognizing the deep ambiguity and paradox that are at the conjunction of these two ways of being. Malcolm X described Christianity as the 'perfect slave religion' because he saw how White people invented a religion calculated to keep Black people passive in slavery and subservient after emancipation. Therefore, the first requirement for understanding what it means to be Black and Christian is to admit that Christianity has been used to subjugate Africans and African Americans. Too many [persons of African descent] lack the spiritual and intellectual courage to make that admission. But only after we have made it can we begin to see how Blackness [Afrocentrism], as a state of mind... and as a theological and cultural demystification of Anglo-Saxon religion and culture, can correct the distortions that modern racism induced into the message and mission of Jesus.¹²

The Rev. Warren Dennis has assessed the origins of this situation as it pertains to Presbyterians of African descent and suggests how an Afrocentric perspective provides a means of remedy:

The last five hundred years of world history have been devastating for the acquisition of knowledge about other than European culture and history. Thus, we need to reclaim the negative and the positive of our African past prior to our converting to the Presbyterian system of belief as further response to the conditions of racism that have maligned, omitted, and distorted our images and culture as important contributions. As Black Presbyterians, we no longer have to view ourselves from the cultural perspective and history of the majority of Presbyterians.¹³

According to Dennis, Afrocentrism is one method by which African-American Presbyterians can reclaim their cultural, historical, and spiritual heritage as a means of more effectively relating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the challenges faced by the wider African-American community today:

As a method of inquiry [Afrocentrism] asks the question, how do we gather meaning out of African or other existence? ...Afrocentrism becomes the source of regeneration for our true values and beliefs grounded in a method of inquiry and discernment. ...By lifting up Afrocentrism as a method of exploration, the centrality of African ideas, beliefs, and values as valid frames of reference for acquiring and examining historical and Biblical data for truth and accuracy is established. Afrocentrism then is a picture of the way things are actually represented in our most comprehensive ideas of nature, self, and society. It is the composite montage

IS THIS NEW WINE?

15

of specific ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, which is peculiar to African Americans in general, and African American Presbyterians in particular as distinguished from other groups.¹⁴

PART IV: THE HALF-CENTURY ANNIVERSARY OF THE
AFRICAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA: A VISION

The year is 2052, and the African Presbyterian Church in America is celebrating its 50th Anniversary. Seven years before its founding a small group of African-Americans, who were then members of the Presbyterian Church (USA), captured a vision for a new Presbyterian church free of the tenacious grip of racism. We are gathered in the sanctuary of the First African Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia. For all who know, this represents a phenomenon in human history. For this was the first congregational expression of Black Presbyterianism in the older Euro-American Presbyterian Church (USA). Today, at almost 250 years of age (First African was founded in 1807), it ~~was~~ the first church of the 50 year old denomination whose anniversary we are assembled to celebrate today.

As an overflowing crowd fills the pews and chancel, a speaker emerges from the gathered community and approaches the pulpit. It is the daughter of one of those who ventured to dream sixty years ago. She was one of the first persons ordained to ministry in the African Presbyterian Church. As she begins her prayer she recalls how good God has been to this community of believers. She recalls the early struggles: how some African-Americans resisted the call toward an African-centered proclamation of the Gospel, but how the faithful were the continuing recipients of God's love, mercy, and grace.

IS THIS NEW WINE?

Other speakers followed. Among some of the points being made included: recognition of how the "new" church began with 100 congregations following a seven year long planning/education process; how the denomination has 575 congregations with 1.75 million members; how its communion reflected every African grouping in the world: Afro-Brazilians, Jamaicans, Afro-Brits, Haitians, Ghanaians, Kenyans, and so many others. And of course, there were African-Americans who hold special place since it was the fathers and mothers of those presents today who were the bearers of a dream first realized fifty years ago with no real notion of what God would wrought.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) out of which that first group of Blacks emerged, is still in existence, though barely. Currently, it numbers less than 250,000 members, many of whom are white, male, and over seventy years old. For this denomination, towards the end of the last century, so successfully alienated women, people of color, and others who were determined not to be suitable for membership, that the current church is almost a homogenous group, racially, generationally, nationally, and in gender. While there are residual representatives from communities of color and other formerly marginalized people, they enjoy no real access to the corridors of power within the PCUSA.

It is remarkable, notes one celebrant, that in the 1990's African-American males were considered an "endangered species." Now, as the speaker surveys the participants crowding the sanctuary, he notes how the room is a balance of men and women, many of whom appear to be arranged in family groupings with as many children and young adults as older believers. Young men now are rarely seen idle on urban street corners since most work long hours in family-owned businesses or have formed partnerships and others business organizations with what tends to be members of the church.

IS THIS NEW WINE?

17

Most congregations within the APCA have founded elementary parish schools where young pupils are taught the typical grammar school's as well as APCA church history and PCUSA history since 1807. The required languages are Spanish and at least one primary African language. Some schools offer Korean where there are large numbers of Korean people residing in close proximity to APCA neighborhoods. Musical instruction as well as art appreciation are also significant components of the curriculum. Early on in the education of the young is fostered the belief that a college education is an absolute minimum for preparation for the world. The APCA child is taught that they have been called by God to lead the world. Education is believed to be a principal means of preparing for this responsibility.

There were many, many more expressions of joy testifying to the power and love of God as reflected by the successes of this community of God.

IS THIS NEW WINE?

PART VI:

WHERE TO FROM HERE:CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

*God of our weary years,
 God of our silent tears...
 Keep us forever in the path we pray.
 -James Weldon Johnson,
Lift Every Voice and Sing*

Conclusion:

Presbyterians for Prayer, Study, and Action aim to encourage African-American Presbyterians and others concerned with the welfare of the Black community to be more focused in addressing the crisis of survival facing African-Americans today. In so doing, we feel that all options, including establishment of an entirely new denominational structure if necessary, must be considered. Inevitably, some will view even dialogue of this matter to be schismatic. On the contrary, It is not schismatic to suggest that Black Presbyterians must be concerned with the welfare of their own children and communities as the first priority rather than the denominational politics of trying to be heard by others as a primary concern. That is common sense.

It should be emphasized that this concept is not presented as some sort of ultimatum to the denomination: "if it does what we want, then we will do this; if it doesn't, we'll do that." Indeed, this discussion is not about the Presbyterian Church (USA) at all. It is about the needs of African-American

IS THIS NEW WINE?

19

communities and what we, as African-American Presbyterians, intend to do about addressing those needs.

While the task may not be easy, the late Rev. James Cleveland reminded us that we "don't believe that God brought us this far to leave us" alone and unattended now. It is clear that the "God of our weary years, the God of our silent tears, ...who has led us into the light" is able to "keep us forever in God's path" as we journey toward a new century with new theological wine: the Gospel of Jesus Christ in African-American communities by Presbyterians that is truly Afrocentric.

Recommendations:

In order to initiate dialogue about the concepts presented in this paper, some very practical and strategic recommendations are in order. The following are submitted for consideration of all who wish to pledge themselves anew to a witness to the love and liberation found in Jesus Christ which seeks to be oriented within the unique needs, history, culture, and aspirations of the African-American community rather than viewing these as peripheral. This is a call to pour what we believe is "the new wine" of an Afrocentric proclamation of the Gospel into "new wine skins" of relevant ministries.

Recommended Actions:

1. DISTRIBUTION OF THIS PAPER TO AFRICAN-AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN SESSIONS FOR THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CONGREGATIONS THROUGH PRAYERFUL STUDY AND DIALOGUE. It is recommended that African-American Presbyterian Sessions and congregations should, as soon as possible, arrange for the prayerful study and dialogue within their respective Presbyteries and Synods of the issues raised in this paper.

IS THIS NEW WINE?

2. ARRANGE A NATIONAL MEETING OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANS TO DISCUSS THIS MATTER.

A national meeting to which all African-American Presbyterians would be invited should be arranged as quickly as possible to consider the issues raised in this paper. This would allow for dialogue around ideas presented and/or for the development of appropriate alternatives aimed at accomplishing the goal of empowering Black Presbyterians toward an Afrocentric proclamation of the Gospel.

3. INITIATION DURING 1993 OF A SEVEN YEAR PERIOD OF PRAYER, STUDY, AND ACTION REGARDING CONCEPTS OUTLINED IN THIS PAPER.

It is recommended that a seven year period of prayer, study, and action be initiated by AUGUST, 1993 concerning the proposals outlined in this paper. During this period, pragmatic steps will be outlined and undertaken with a view toward creation of an African-centered Presbyterian witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. These steps should include, but not be limited to the following: (A) Development of appropriate theological reflection regarding concepts raised in this paper; (B) The adoption of a national goal calling for the establishment of at least five new African-American Presbyterian congregations annually over the next seven years; (C) Funds should be set aside (\$500 annually) by all existing African-American Presbyterian congregations for support of new church development in African-American communities as well as by individuals able to do so; (D) The establishment of New Church Development Leadership Teams (a paradigm for new church development that includes the pastor, secretarial support, and a musician with skills in Afrocentric musicianship); and (F) the outlining of regional organizational and administrative structures.

IS THIS NEW WINE?

4. DIALOGUE CONCERNING ISSUES RAISED IN "NEW WINE"

The following questions are designed to help Black Presbyterian sessions and congregations analyze the various issues presented in this paper through open dialogue. It is suggested that copies of this paper be distributed to all Session members at least two weeks prior to coming together for discussion. An entire Session meeting should be devoted to dialogue around the following questions. Sessions may wish to involve their congregations in the discussion and/or meet with representatives of several area congregations. In addition to the following, other discussion questions may be formulated.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are you Presbyterian?
2. What are the merits of being an African American Presbyterian?
3. The paper suggests that it may not be possible for Black Presbyterian congregations to be Afrocentric and remain in the denomination. Do you agree/disagree? Explain the rationale behind your answer.
4. What is Afrocentrism? What does the paper describe as its major value to society today? Do you agree/disagree?
5. How is Afrocentrism similar to and different from efforts to "lift up the race" undertaken by Black Presbyterians of previous generations?
6. Analyze your congregation's efforts to do outreach community ministry.
 - A. What are things your congregation is doing well? What causes these efforts to be successful?
 - B. What is not working as well as you think it should? What are some of the reasons causing this lack of success?
7. Would you describe your congregation an Afrocentric congregation? If so, in what way? If not, why do you think it is not?
8. Do you see the denomination as being supportive of your church's ministry in African-American communities? If yes, how? If no, why do you feel it is not?
9. Is it possible for Black Presbyterians to reclaim the five resources of the Black Religious Heritage (see page 4)?

IS THIS NEW WINE?

10. What is the portrait of the African American community outlined in the half-century vision of the African Presbyterian Church in America?
 - A. What are the practical steps Black congregations need to take to contribute toward achieving such a goal?
 - B. Is it possible for African American Presbyterians to work toward achieving that vision in ways other than creating another denominational structure? If so, which ways? If not, why not?
11. The paper suggests a seven-year period of prayer, study, and action regarding the issues presented. Is this practical? If yes, explain your answer. If no, how would you modify the suggestion in order to strengthen it?
12. Luke 4:18-19 is typically understood as underscoring Jesus' understanding of his mission to be one of liberating the oppressed. Matthew 28:19-20 is generally viewed as a scripture wherein the Risen Christ stresses evangelism on the part of the disciples concerning the message of the Gospel. Examine some of the following scripture passages. What do these Bible verses suggest concerning the faith community's belief that God calls believers to testify, through their deeds, concerning Divine liberation goals.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Exodus 3:1-10; B. II Chronicles 7:11-14; C. Psalm 40:1-11; D. Amos 5:21-24 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> E. Micah 6:6-8 F. Acts 2:1-13; 4:32-35 G. I Corinthians 13:1-13 H. Revelation 21:1-4
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Definition of Terms

AFROCENTRICITY: A perspective of the universe (or world-view) that places Africa as the center for persons of African descent (as for Asians, an Asian-oriented center or Europeans, a European-oriented center). This perspective makes Africa the subject rather than object of all inquiry and investigation. Instead of using other cultural perspectives by which to evaluate/compare Africa, Africa becomes the standard by which other cultures, histories, and sociopolitical systems are compared.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH: Church denominations or individual congregations in the United States whose constituent memberships/parishioners are predominately composed of persons of African descent.

AFROCENTRIC CHURCH: An African-American congregation whose proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is informed and shaped by an Afrocentric consciousness. It points out Africa's role in giving birth to Judeo-Christian theological tenets in ways generally overlooked by traditional Eurocentric scholarship. Evangelism, mission, Christian education, nurture, and stewardship in the Afrocentric congregation all emphasize the distinctive contributions of Africa in the formation of the Gospel.

BLACK THEOLOGY: Black theology is a distinct theological position within Christian religion which uses the experience of Black people as the starting point for all discussion about God and Divine relationship to and involvement in the universe. It is based upon a sociopolitical and economic context apart from that which is generally identified as (so-called) traditional Western theology, but which is, in fact, White western theology. White western theology, by contrast, has been structured primarily in keeping with the sociopolitical and economic events in Europe or theological tenets growing out of that context.

OUTREACH: Efforts of a particular congregation to organize and carry out activities aimed at:

- A. Inviting persons who are not actively affiliated with any faith or Christian congregation to become involved in the mission, life, and ministry of that congregation based upon faith in Jesus Christ; and/or
- B. Activities that are not primarily designed to have individuals become part of the congregation, but which are essentially service and/or advocacy oriented.

IS THIS NEW WINE?

21

NOTES:

1. The Kelly Miller Smith Institute, What Does It Mean to be Black and Christian. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Divinity School. October, 1992. pp. 1-2.

2. Mildred Brown, Associate, Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit (PCUSA), noted that as a result of consultations with Congregational Development Committees of several Presbyteries, there was little or no manifested interest in initiating new congregations in areas of significant African American populations. Report on "African American New Church Development" given to the African American Advisory Committee Meeting, 10-12 December, 1990, Longboat Key, FL.

3. Wilmore, Gayraud S. Black and Presbyterian: The Heritage and the Hope. Philadelphia, PA: Geneva Press, 1983. p. 35

4. Ibid., p. 55.

5. Ibid., pp. 93-100.

6. Op. Cit., p. 2.

7. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine such issues, it should be noted that at various times throughout the history of Black Presbyterianism, the matter of withdrawing from the predominately White denomination has been debated (see Wilmore's Black and Presbyterian, pp. 69-70.) At the December 1-5, 1992 African-American Advisory Committee meeting in Montego Bay, Jamaica, it was informally reported that in at least two separate meetings of key African American clergy leaders within the denomination (one in 1968 and the other as recently as 1990) serious discussion was given to withdrawal from the denomination.

8. Op. Cit., p. 37.

9. Op. Cit., p. 39.

10. Asante, Molefi Kete. The Afrocentric Idea. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987. p. 3.

11. Asante, Molefi K., Afrocentricity. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 1988. See chapter 3: Analysis and Science, particularly the discussion of "The Way of Newness, Levels of Transformation, Consciousness, and Relationships." Asante presents a radical critique of the limitations of an Eurocentric presentation of the Gospel for the African and what movement toward an Afrocentric consciousness can do to enable a "victorious" perspective. pp.47-52.

12. Op. Cit., p. 11.

13. Dennis, Warren, "Afrocentrism," an address delivered 13 November, 1992 to the African American Presbyterian Heritage Colloquium II held at Johnson C. Smith Seminary, Atlanta, GA.

14. Ibid.

APPENDIX B

CITY AS TEXT SYLLABUS

Syllabus The City as Text

Professor: Warren Dennis;
e-mail: Warrend50@AOL.com

Spring Tri-semester, 1997

Introduction

Urban theological education in the 1990s takes place in an environment of change, crisis, and conflict. "Our inner-cities, says William Julius Wilson, are the most deteriorated of industrialized nations." As such, American cities have become a less desirable place in which to live. It could be argue that the African American community is in a state of crisis. Beneath the crisis are the many aspects of urban failure, e.g., the lack of quality public education, affordable housing and health care, failed public policies, lost of hope, a low level of personal self esteem, a sense of chronic failure, a deteriorating social structure, a predominance of racial stereotyping and rejection, suburban expansion, "disappearance of prime age employment" in the face of manufacture downsizing and advance technology.

A 21st century conversation of contextual urban theological education is significant to this course. It presents a distinct challenge to the notion of curricula development and the praxis of urban ministry. Urban history and reflection, ethnographically, is critical to any conversation of urban theological education. In this case, the course design calls for a theological pedagogy that has as its' center the congregation and the community. The shift presented here urge moving from a traditional campus based learning paradigm to an emphasis on non-campus based learning. It also argues for more research and a rethinking of basic premises of doing theology.

The problem addressed in this course is concern with bridging the theological and pedagogical gulf between urban theological education in the seminary, the church, and the community. The gulf has resulted in academia's seemingly inability to meet the new challenge of social, economic, and structural dislocation within an increasingly urban society. While it is true that theological education and more specifically 'Black Theology' has provided leadership and a beneficial analytical framework for examining problems in the black milieu, the fact can not be denied that a crisis of great proportion exist in the black church and community that has called into question the effectiveness of the academy and the black church.

The technological advances and global economic shift of the past fifty years have created a climate of uncertainty for inner-city communities across the country. Once thriving industrial communities now are vast ghettos and waste lands. In contrast, we have moved from being a labor- intensive society to a market driven service economy that relies more on information and knowledge as its economic product of the future. This focused period between the legacy of President Ronald Regan's administration through the second term of Bill Clinton's has seen more government cut backs for the poor, disinvestment in cities, deteriorating education systems, political entrenchment, flawed welfare and health-care reform policies, and corporate greed and downsizing then any other time. Social, economic, and political policies driven by class ideologies of racism, classism, sexism, individualism, and consumerism have marked the end of the industrial revolution in much the same way it began.

Considering the above analysis, this course addressed primarily the scope and breath of theological education in urban grassroots situations. It is concern with the way people of faith in inner-city neighborhoods act to define, sustain, and transform their communities. By definition of grassroots, we mean inner-city poor and working class people who struggle daily against public policies and regulations to make ends meet.

Syllabus

Spring Trimester, 1997

Professor: Warren Dennis
e-mail: Warrend50@AOL.com

The City as Text

Description:

This course seeks to cover a range of contemporary urban issues in theological education. Broad in scope and thorough in active theological reflection, community residents East Orange, church members of Elmwood, and students of NBTS will participate in ethnographic research method to discern the teaching and religious capacity of the grassroots to define, sustain, and transform urban communities in times of crisis. Harambee Community Economic Development Center will provide the learning context for that portion of the class which engages community dialogue and practice. Through involvement in this learning experience, persons are enabled to understand processes and principles of theological education.

Relevancy For Ministry

This course is designed to exposes students to an ethnographic research approach to urban ministry. Ethnographic research by definition explores and describes culture. The urban ministry context provides an appropriate culture specific learning environment for theological education to explore and discern the presence of God; and it is a place where grassroots theologies of adult learners are focus. The academic and practical learning focus is one which enables future church leaders to assist congregations and communities to discover and reclaim 'core' theological and pedagogical values for revitalization.

Objective

In order to achieve the purpose of this course, Afrocentrism, principles of urban theological education (empowerment, collaboration, and transformation), and land-use planning paradigms must become the framework to address the crisis of urban ministry.

Schedule:

Week 1 April 7 th	Harambee: Introduction; An Afrocentrism framework Professor: wa Kenyatta
Week 2 April 14 th	Harambee: Economic Empowerment Mrs. Gloria Fredrick, Exective Director of the Office of Neighborhood Empowerment
Week 3 April 21 st	Harambee: Politics and Government Mr. Leland McGee, Attorney for the City of East Orange
Week 4 April 28 th	Harambee: Health Care
Week 5 May 5 th	Harambee: Education Dr. Roosevelt Weaver, Principal of the Nassau School of East Orange
Week 6 May 12 th	Harambee: Social
Week 7 May 19 th	Harambee: Technology Mr. Nevell Clarke of AT&T
May 26	Memorial Holiday
Week 8 June 2 nd	Harambee: Physical

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

Date _____

I, _____, give consent to Professor Warren L. Dennis of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Doctoral Candidate at United Theological Seminary for my participation in the research study tentatively entitled: "Ethnographic Study of Urban Theological Education: In Response the Question "Is This New Wine?"

- 1) It has been fully explained to me that the purpose of the study is two fold: to describe through ethnographic research method the teaching and religious capacity of the black community to define, sustain, and transform itself in times of crisis; 2) based on the results of the research explore 'core' theological and pedagogical themes for a curriculum for urban adult learners that would bridge the gulf between the academy, the church, and the grassroots urban community.
- 2) Data will be collected by video observation and interview in the context of a specifically designed course of New Brunswick Theological Seminary entitled, "The City as Text".
- 3) My name and any personal information will be kept confidential.
- 4) I understand that I may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time.
- 5) I understand that by participation in this study I may help the class and researcher gain a better understanding of the theological issues inherent in the gulf between the academy, the church, and the community.
- 6) If I have further questions concerning the research study, I can feel free to contact Professor _____, at any time.
- 7) I have received a copy of this consent form.

I have read and understand the purpose of this study and voluntarily consent to participate.

Signature of Participation _____

Witness and Titled _____

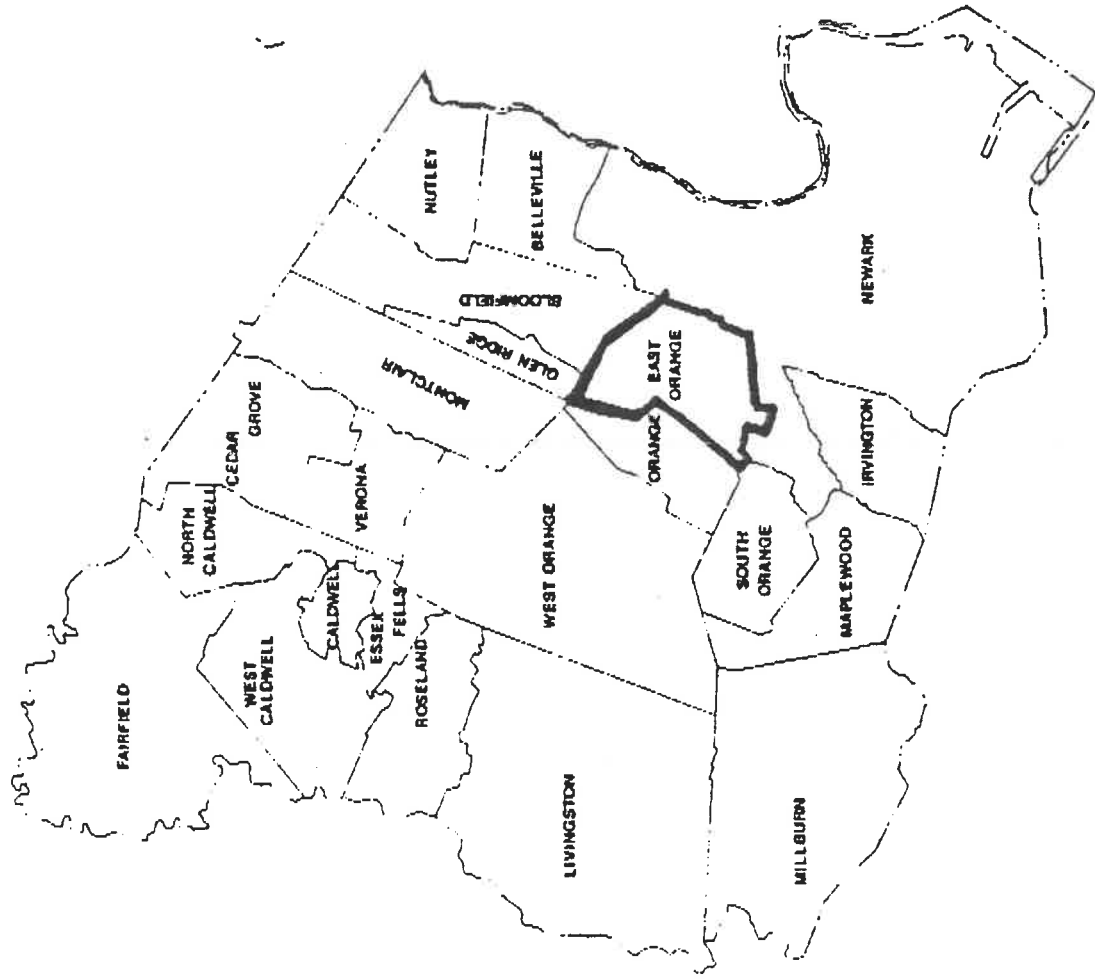
APPENDIX D

MAP OF EAST ORANGE

ESSEX COUNTY MUNICIPALITIES

CENSUS OF ESSEX COUNTY (1990)

Municipality	Area Sq. Miles	Population
Belleville	3.30	34,213
Bloomfield	5.40	45,061
Caldwell	1.20	7,542
Cedar Grove	4.50	12,053
East Orange	4.00	73,552
Essex Fells	1.30	2,139
Fairfield	10.58	7,583
Glen Ridge	1.30	7,076
Irvington	2.80	61,018
Livingston	14.00	26,609
Maplewood	4.00	21,652
Millburn	10.00	18,630
Monclair	6.20	37,729
Newark	24.14	275,221
North Caldwell	2.90	6,706
Nutley	3.40	27,099
Orange	2.20	29,925
Roseland	3.58	4,847
South Orange	2.70	16,390
Verona	2.80	13,597
West Caldwell	5.04	10,461
West Orange	12.10	39,103
Total	127.44 sq. mi	778,206



[219]

APPENDIX E
CORRESPONDANCE

Memorandum

TO: Gloria Freddrick, Michael Livingston, Calvin Spann, Leo Sharrod,
Jacqueline Thomas

From: Warren L. Dennis

Date: January 13, 1998

Re: Scheduled Context Associate Meeting, Wednesday, October, 22nd 4-6:00
PM.

This is it. I am almost there! October 15 I will give over my research document to Michele Tuck to edit. October 30-31 I will meet in Charlotte for a peer group meeting to go over final preparations for oral exams December 4-6.

I am writing to confirm that everyone, except Calvin, are able to meet on December 22nd from 4-6:00 PM. I hope to have in your hands a draft copy of the final research project for our discussion. Please! Please! Mark your calendars for this important date and time.

We will meet in my office at New Brunswick Seminary.

January 12, 1997

Dear Jacke,

The enclosed is a earlier draft of my doctoral ministry work thus far. Instead of trying to print the latest version the night of our phone conversation, I found this copy that was present to my peers and mentors last October. I have made some revisions since then (I'm always making some changes. It is a living document). The changes are somewhat minor and won't change the larger scope of what you and other associates will have before you.

My apologies. I know its been a while since I first asked you to serve as a Contextual Associate and advisor to my Doctoral Ministry project. By way of explanation, you might say I was a little premature in my request; as well, I experienced a number of revisions of the first three phases of work before now.

This should serve as a working document for the duration of our discussions and work together. It represents three phases of my Doctoral of Ministry work at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. The fourth and fifth phases are devoted to implementation, evaluation and the proposed project.

Description of Context Associates:

...are members of a team of four to twelve persons chosen by the candidate to work with him/her in planning and implementing the ministry model within the local context. Persons are usually chosen to be a representative sampling of the total context, although they are also selected because they are interest in increasing the effectiveness of the ministry in the specific area of doctoral work.

I have asked five persons to be associates. I would like to schedule an initial meeting for Wednesday, February 5th at 6: to 7:30 PM at New Brunswick Seminary to map out a course of direction to achieve the objectives set out in the Candidacy Review. If for whatever reason this is not suitable, Please let me know and I will work hard to coordinate a date convenient for everyone. It is important that all are present at the initial gathering. The only difficult date for me are Mondays because of my teaching schedule this trimester. You can contact me at (908) 846-2450 home; Fax (908) 249-5412; and/or e-mail warrend50@aol.com

Yours truly,

February 18, 1997

Dear Rev. Burkins,

As you may know, I am in the implementation phase of my Doctor of Ministry work at United Theological Seminary. This letter comes as a follow-up to our conversation two weeks ago requesting the identification of six to eight persons from Elmwood Presbyterian Church who might assist me in my Doctor of Ministry research efforts reflecting on the document "Is This New Wine?" The document itself is not the focal point of this request, rather it will serve as background to the research. The primary focus is the church and the seminary in dialogue with the grassroots persons in discerning the liberative motifs of God in the community. This to me represents a new approach to theological education (and more specifically urban ministry) that places a premium of collaboration and dialogue in ascertaining the culture and religious voice of grassroots people.

The purpose of my project is twofold: to describe through ethnographic research method (that values listening to the community people) the teaching and religious capacity of the black community to define, sustain, and transform itself in times of crisis; and based on the results of that research develop a 'core' curriculum for urban adult learners that would bridge the pedagogical and theological gulf between the academy, the church, and the grassroots urban community. The challenge for me in this dialogue is to construct an Afrocentric framework that would empower and transform New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and African American Presbyterian congregations (and more particularly Elmwood) in their efforts to be faithful servants within the urban community. The end result here is a partnership in theological education.

Persons from Elmwood who agree to be a part of this research endeavor are asked to covenant together on Monday(s) from 6:P.M to 9:P.M. for eight weeks beginning April 7 thru. June 2, 1997 at the Harambee Community Center of East Orange, New Jersey. Meetings will begin with a light meal. Each session will be framed by scripture and a practitioner in the public sphere of civic life, i.e. social, economic, health, etc., followed by respondents from the community, followed then by a dialogue among students from the seminary, representatives of Elmwood, and the neighborhood surrounding Harambee. I would meet with these persons before hand to outline what is expected of them and the anticipated outcome of their engagement.

Students participating are part of a new course I have develop as part of the design entitled: "The City as Text." From this context they are representing the academy dimension of the triad equation.

The criteria I would ask you to consider is how you might use the knowledge and insight gain from this experience. They may become a new entity of Elmwood' s adult education program and/ or evangelistic outreach. In this light, I would suggest persons who have expressed a prophetic passion for justice against the systematic violation of indigenous persons' rights. These persons should also see themselves carrying out Elmwood' s purpose and mission.

Thank you once again for responding favorably to this request. Your assistance in this engagement of breaking new ground in urban theological education is greatly appreciated.

Yours truly,

Interoffice Memo

Date: 03/13/97

To: Leo Sherard, Michael Livingston, Jacque Thomas, Calvin Spann, Gloria Frederick

From: Warren Dennis; e-mail: Warrend50@AOL.com

RE: **Mark your Calendars:** Next Contextual Associate Meeting, Monday, April 7 @ Harambee Community Economic Development Center, 60 Glenwood Ave. East Orange, New Jersey

Monday, April 7 represent the first of eight meetings of off-campus urban theological education. Here we will explore with community and church persons the core themes of urban theological discourse. The purpose of this investigation is to describe the teaching and religious capacity of the black community to define, sustain, and transform itself in times of crisis; and based on the results of the research explore 'core' theological and pedagogical themes for a curriculum development for urban adult learners in grassroots communities.

Our meetings from 6:00 -9:00 p.m. begin with a light meal as a means of community building.

This initiates eight weeks of research for collecting the ethnographic data for our project. Three groups will provide the source of data collection: 8 members of Elmwood Presbyterian Church, 8 Residents of Harambee, and 10 students of New Brunswick Seminary. The students are a part of a new course I have developed entitled: "**The City as Text.**" Each week's discussion will be framed by a presenter of a functional area of community life e.g. social, economic, political.

This first session will frame an Afrocentric discussion by Kamau T. wa-Kenyatta. Wa-Kenyatta is a Ph.D. candidate of Temple University. He has adjunct for New Brunswick Seminary, teaching "African Presence in the Bible" last spring tri-semester.

It is understood that you will attend as many of these session as you schedule will permit. This first meeting, however, is essential for each Contextual Associate "to be on the same page" sort of speak. Your primary role is advising me on the integrity of the research process.

I continue to be excited about the significance of this 21st century conversation on urban theological education. It presents for me a distinct challenge to the notion of curricula development and the praxis of urban ministry.

Directions from Garden State Parkway:

ENCLOSED

March 25, 1997

Dear Ms. Johnson,

Thank you for your willing response to be apart of a significant urban theological education discussion. This letter comes as a follow-up to a conversation you had with Rev. Robert Burkins requesting your participation in a special research project of church, seminary, and community. The primary focus of this theological research involves Elmwood Presbyterian Church, Harambee Community Economic Development Initiative and New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

The purpose is to dialogue with residents of the Harambee community over an eight week period how their religious faith sustains them in times of crisis; and to bridge the gulf between the church, the seminary and the community. I have developed a course entitled: "The City As Text" that will serve as the framework for our discussions.

We will meet on Monday (s) from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. beginning April 7th through June 2nd at the Harambee Community Center. Our meetings will begin with a light meal. Each session will be framed by scripture, a presentation by a public policy practitioner, followed by a dialogue among students, residents, and members from Elmwood.

Thank you again for your willingness to be apart of this mission exploration. I would be more than willing to meet with you or to answer any questions you may have before hand as to expectations and the anticipated outcome of your engagement.

Sincerely

CC: Rev. Burkins

J. Thomas

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